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INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY - TWO ATTEMPTS?
A STUDY IN THE WRITINGS OF
DR. KOSUKE KOYAMA AND DR. CHOAN-SENG SONG

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

1994
ABSTRACT

The question of Indigenous Theology is not new. The relationship between gospel and culture which provides the basic parameters for the indigenization of theology is something with which the Early Church Fathers and even Paul and John have had to deal. Indigenous theology is therefore as old as Christianity itself. Yet in spite of its ancient beginning, the fact is that only since the missionary movement of the Western Churches during the turn of the century did it become a recognized theological subject of any real significance.

Coupled with the fact that only in the last fifty years did many of the Younger Churches begin to realize the need for theological independence in order for the gospel to have a meaningful impact in their historical situations, it is no surprise that the question of gospel-culture relations (indigenization) has continued to demand the attention of many christians in the Third World. The appearance of the concept of 'contextualization' in the second half of this century is indicative of this continuing interest in the subject.

The seemingly ready acceptance of this new theological approach has given a new twist to the "enduring problem" of gospel and culture. It has raised new issues and tended to compound questions regarding the meaning and validity of the old approach. It has incited what has come to be termed the indigenization-contextualization debate. This research study is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing discussion centred
on gospel and culture as it is expressed in the concept of indigenous theology.

Indigenous theology is a legitimate approach to the christian task of expressing God’s love manifested in Jesus in ways, forms and modes of thought and meaning that are intelligible and relevant to the experience of people in a particular cultural setting. Its validity as a theological approach is rooted in the incarnation itself. It is particularized theology. That is, it seeks to utilize all the available resources in a given culture in order to give an adequate expression to the content of the faith. It also seeks to deal biblically and theologically with all kinds of issues which are in need of urgent treatment.

As a focus for clarification of some of the issues relating to the validity and meaning of the concept of indigenous theology, an examination of the writings of Kosuke Koyama and C. S. Song is considered appropriate for two main reasons. First, Koyama and Song are two theologians at the forefront of Asian attempts to bridge the gap between theological expressions of the faith and Asian histories and cultures. Secondly, our reading of Koyama and Song has led us to believe that each one is indeed engaged in the business of constructing indigenous theology in Asia. Thus a study of their works may not only shed light on the nature and meaning of indigenous theology, it may also prove an enrichment to the life of the ecumenical christian community.

(Approximately 145,000 words).
The search for a deeper understanding of the dialectic between Gospel and Culture in the life of the Church has been a common task of Christians in all ages. Participation in this search by the small Christian communities of the South Pacific islands has become more intense in the last decade. This is quite necessary in view of the fact that the relationship between Gospel and Culture constitutes a highly contentious and delicate issue for Pacific island Christians who perhaps by virtue of their remoteness from the rest of the world tend to hold what might be called a 'high view' of their cultures.

The statement, "E vaavaalua le aganuu ma le Tala Lelei," which literally means "culture and Gospel are inseparable; the two go hand-in-hand," represents a general maxim of Samoan religiosity with which no qualms could probably be raised. But when a statement such as, "E le mafai ona ola le Tala Lelei e aunoa ma le aganuu," (literally, "The Gospel cannot grow (exist) without Culture") is frequently heard among deacons and even the clergy, then a theological discrepancy arises which cannot be discarded lightly without falling into the pit often known as 'culture Christianity.'

In the context of my own Samoan Christian community, discrepancies rooted in theological understanding of Gospel-Culture relations have had drastic consequences in the life of Christians both at individual and parish levels. And it is the reality of this situation which emphasizes the need to
explore at greater depth the nature of the relationship between Gospel and Culture.

My concern with the subject of Indigenous Theology which forms the content of the following pages is an effort to participate in and to contribute to this theological exploration. What other Christians are thinking may enable us to bring our understanding to a clear focus. A study of two Asian theologians is intended to serve this purpose.

The writing of this dissertation could never have been possible without the insights, encouragement, example and practical assistance of a great many people. My wife and children, my parents and in-laws, my extended family and friends, staff and students of Knox Theological Hall, the Board of Directors of Malua Theological College and my EFKS Church community in South Dunedin have all contributed immensely to this work.

It is impossible to put a name to every individual or group, however each contribution is acknowledged with thankfulness before God.

To my former teacher, theological mentor and supervisor, Professor Frank Nichol, I wish to express a special word of gratitude. Without his critical but sensitive comments and suggestions, without his unfailing kindness and commitment, this work would never have come to completion. His faith and courage as reflected in his patience and willingness to guide me throughout the course of my research have been a constant source of inspiration. To this teacher, friend and fellow Christian I owe a great deal.
Similarly, I wish to thank past and present staff members of Knox Theological Hall whose comments, suggestions and advice have contributed in no small way to this thesis. Professors Peter Matheson, John Bluck, Maurice Andrew and Alan Torrance are a few names. Thanks are also due to members of THERESA (Theological Hall Research Students Association) for the insights and technical help gained through regular discussions and presentation of papers. The same goes for members of the Asian-Pacific Christianity research group to whom the chapter on Song’s view of history was read. John C. England, Simon Rae and Albert C. Moore must be mentioned for their helpful comments and questions.

My sincere thanks must go to my home Church - Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano i Samoa - for the financial assistance without which it would have been impossible to undertake this research. Not only that, I believe without your faithful ‘tapuaiga’ and prayers, it would have been impossible to put up with the unbearable feeling of isolation and solitude often experienced by a research student in a different country. In the same vein I wish to thank the Dunedin Samoan parish community for their friendship and kindness.

Mrs Beth Nichol has my deepest gratitude for the willingness and diligence with which she single-handedly proofread the entire text. I am greatly indebted to her exactness and kindness in carrying out this task so meticulously. Her valuable suggestions and verbal commentary on grammatical errors have been of tremendous personal benefit
as I am sure it would be to anyone for whom English is a second language.

To my parents, Tama and Tina (Koria & Olita), my mother-in-law Pula Vaifou Faraimo, my brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, and the whole family, a special word of thanks is in order. For your prayers and the spirit of encouragement conveyed through letter or by word of mouth during ten difficult years of separation, I am truly grateful.

Lastly, but not least, I must thank my wife and children for their endurance, not only during the writing of this thesis but also through the long and difficult years of student life. To my children Olita, Pine, Faafetai and Erosi, thanks for your patience and unwavering understanding. My wife and team-mate Dora, in particular, who has supported me with patience, encouragement and love through all the hardships and trials associated with doctoral research, must receive my heart-felt gratitude. For the quality of care, understanding and warmth with which she has put up with these lean years of study, my admiration goes beyond words. To her and my children, then, together with our parents, our families and our Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, this thesis is dedicated with love.
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<td>Christian Conference of Asia</td>
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<td>CISRS</td>
<td>Christian Institute for the Study of Religion &amp; Society</td>
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<td>CLS</td>
<td>Christian Literature Society</td>
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<td>CMR</td>
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<td>IMC</td>
<td>International Missionary Conference</td>
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<td>IRM</td>
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<td>JCG</td>
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INTRODUCTION

A. What The Study Is About.

The main subject of this study is the question of Indigenous Theology examined in connection with the works of Dr. Choan Seng Song and Dr. Kosuke Koyama. As the title might indicate, the basic attempt here is to gain a clearer understanding of that theological approach commonly known as indigenous theology. The attempt would involve us in a critical examination of the writings of Song and Koyama for the purpose of drawing out elements in their theological approaches that can be deemed characteristic of what indigenous theology is understood to be. The effort is to try and identify the links between what is taken to be indigenous theology and the theological programs of these Asian theologians.

The main concerns of this study may be stated in the form of questions. Two basic sets are as follows: (1) What is indigenous theology? Is this a legitimate or valid way of doing theology? (2) What characteristic features of an indigenous theology are represented in the theologies of Song and Koyama? In what ways might their theological attempts to express the faith be regarded as an indigenous theology?
B. Why This Subject?

Several reasons, both personal and academic, account for the choice of this subject. Interest is due in part to personal anticipation of a theological teaching ministry in future.¹ Bound up with this anticipation is a desire to be an effective and dependable servant in the task of preparing candidates for the ministry of my church. Inherent in this desire is the recognition of the common Christian task of articulating the faith and communicating the message of the gospel.

The word 'effective' is used here in the sense of being able to express theologically the content of the Christian faith in familiar ways, modes of thought and in a language that can be readily understood by my own people. Ways and language that seek to utilize the locally available resources² in the hope of leading people to an informed response to the gospel message.

¹ What concerns me in relation to this anticipated vocation is the question of theological method. How might I approach the task of teaching theology in the context of my home Church? Given the exclusively western tradition of theological expressions of the faith we have inherited, as well as the related problems of interpretation arising from it, the question of an appropriate methodology is a matter of great personal concern.

² I am referring here to the likes of cultural idiosyncrasies and idioms; values and assumptions, thought-forms, folk-traditions, linguistic modes of expression, levels of meanings, etc.,
By being 'dependable' recognizes the need to be faithful to the essential content of the Christian faith as found in the Scriptures and in the history of Christian tradition. At the same time, it refers to the need for theological expressions to have a direct bearing on the particularity of one's own cultural situation. It is my conviction that it is both possible and necessary to do theology in ways and language that befit the culture of any people.

Personal academic interest in this study has its roots in the course of training as a ministry student at Malua Theological College. Once during a lecture, incidental mention was made of the initiation by PTC members of the question of the possibility for a Pacific theology. That is, a theology formulated from the viewpoint of Pacific Islanders. The idea of a "coconut theology" was said to have been proposed. In connection with this idea, reference was made to Koyama’s book, Waterbuffalo Theology, (which we did not have in our College library), as an example of theological expression done from a particular cultural perspective.

This particular instance raised questions which have since continued to be a source of personal challenge. For instance, can such a thing as a Pacific theology be possible? If so, how is it to be formulated? These questions initially led to the realization of the need for a clearer theological

---

3 The ministry training centre of my home Church – the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa.

4 This is the Pacific Theological College situated in Suva, Fiji. Operating under the auspices of the Pacific Council of Churches, it serves as the theological centre of learning for Island Churches within the South Pacific region.
understanding of the relationship between theology and culture.

Later, as a student at Knox Theological Hall, personal experience of a completely different cultural environment and its ramifications within the context of a theological institution reinforced this need. First-hand contact with the works of Kosuke Koyama and C. S. Song had a similar effect. Conversations with students and staff over the subject of theology-culture relations resulted in raising more difficult questions which called for continual personal reflection.

For example: (1) How does one proceed in the theological task of expressing the substance of the Christian gospel in relation to culture? (2) Is it possible for a theologian to be culturally particularistic in his approach to the task of articulating the Christian faith? Or, can an indigenous theological expression of the gospel still be regarded as properly valid and distinctively Christian if it is bound to a particular framework, say, Samoan culture? (3) How is a theologian to go about bringing to expression the experience of Christ in his own concrete and particular situation? (4) And how is this to be related to a Christian tradition that is often expressed in language and concepts vastly different from anything in the current cultural situation?

These kinds of questions impress upon me the need to direct attention to the subject of "indigenous theology" in the conviction that this approach might be found to be a most appropriate, legitimate and viable way of doing theology from a cultural perspective. They also necessitate the need for a
critical analysis of Koyama and Song's writings in the belief that they are theologians engaged in the business of doing indigenous theology.

C. Necessity Of The Study (Viewed from the perspective of a Young Church).

Indigenous Theology is a relatively new topic. The concept of 'indigenization' from which it is born only came to popular usage among mission circles around the turn of the century. But in spite of its recent origin, it has not lacked serious efforts on the part of Christians to engage in the study and demonstration of the fundamentals of it. The wealth of missionary literature; conciliar and individual publications relating to the subject indicate the depth and extent of its treatment by missiologists and theologians alike. Peter Lee's reference to indigenous theology as an "over-cropped land" makes this clear.¹

At the same time, the reference also suggests a possible limitation of this study. To some, it may appear that the subject of indigenous theology is more or less a closed book. Our attempt therefore may in effect, be vain and fruitless; incapable of contributing anything of real value to the body of knowledge in the field of theology. But this cannot be true.

It may be true only in so far as one assumes that nothing more can possibly be discovered about indigenous theology that is not already common knowledge to all. It may be so also as far as theological communities in the older Churches of the West are concerned. But the fact is that for many 'younger Churches' like my own, there is much to be learnt about indigenous theology yet, let alone other kinds of theologies.

The truth of this is again suggested by Peter Lee in the essay referred to previously. With reference to Chinese theology, Lee states that the question that remains in need of an urgent answer is this: "How can Christian thought be expressed in ways more fitting to the Chinese cultural environment?" The suggestion here seems quite obvious. As far as Chinese Christianity is concerned, there is a need to find appropriate ways for indigenizing the Christian faith.

The title of the essay itself implies that while indigenous theology may have been overly treated in some quarters ("over-cropped"), it certainly is an "undeveloped field" in others. In other words, for many people, especially those of Churches with a short Christian history, there is a

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6 Such an assumption is based on the mistaken presuppositions that: (1) there is an absolute point of termination for the acquisition of knowledge, and (2) that the literature containing the knowledge of different ages about indigenous theology is accessible to all theological communities.

7 The phrase "younger Churches" — as it is used here and throughout this study — refers to the churches established through the missionary efforts of the "older" or "sending Churches" of the West.

8 ibid., p. 5.
real need to come to terms with the workings of an indigenous theology.

D. Role Of Study In Current Theological Developments.

In the history of Christian thought, Indigenous Theology in simplest terms, may be understood as the expression of the Christian faith in categories and modes which are native to a given culture. Indigenous theology inevitably involves the basic problem of relating Christ to culture. Niebuhr's classic study, *Christ and Culture* is an attempt to deal with this problem.9

On the whole, the agenda of Indigenous Theology appears to be clear enough. Its main objective basically is to make the Christian faith intelligible in a particular culture. But precisely how this is to be carried out remains a major theological concern. Robert Schreiter's book *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985) deals with this crucial question.

How can this selfsame Gospel, which is given only in a societal and cultural context (even in the New Testament, for that matter) and can never be wholly extricated from any culture, be allowed to speak the language of an entirely different culture?10

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9 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1952). In this book, Niebuhr suggests that the result may be any one of five types of relationships analyzed: (1) Christ against culture, (2) Christ of Culture, (3) Christ above culture, (4) Christ and culture in paradox, and (5) Christ transforms culture.

It is obvious from this question that our concern with indigenous theology is an important one in current theological developments. It shows that our subject is not yet a closed chapter of Christian thought.

For our purposes, there are indeed tenacious aspects of indigenous theology which necessitate further investigation. Still a number of important issues and problems need to be clarified. While the indigenizing of theology has generally become an acceptable enterprise, methods and the actual practice of it have sometimes tended to be viewed with suspicion. Also, the variety of emphases by which the main concern of indigenous theology is expressed tends to betray a diversity of perception as to what indigenous theology really is. Consequently, confusion often becomes inevitable.

Important questions regarding meaning still remain. What does indigenous theology really mean? Can it be distinguished from other kinds of theologies? Also questions about method have yet to be answered. If it is concerned with the expression of the faith in terms of a given culture, how does one proceed to accomplish this goal? What problems are likely to be encountered in attempting to do theology in this way? What criteria must one adopt to judge whether or not an indigenous theology is Christian?

In contemporary theological discussions, a more pressing problem has surfaced in the form of a battle for the survival of the term indigenous theology itself. This problem arises in connection with the popularity of the newly proposed term, contextualization. Increasingly, it seems to be the case that
more and more Christians, particularly on the Asian continent, are favouring the newer term in the conviction that it is far more comprehensive than the older.

This raises an important concern. No doubt if this trend continues, there is a strong possibility that indigenous theology may eventually phase out of use, not just as a useful terminology, but as an appropriate theological approach to the expression of the faith in a specific cultural context. Whether or not this would be the case remains to be seen. Yet the fact that contextualization has come to be regarded a better substitute suggests that perhaps the older term is no longer necessary. It suggests the probability of indigenous theology facing a demise.

Contextualization does also raise the important issue of the validity of Indigenous Theology as a methodological approach in its own right. What is at stake here is the legitimacy of indigenous theology as a distinctive methodological approach to the task of relating the Christian faith to a particular cultural context. The question of distinction between 'indigenous theology' and 'contextual theology' must therefore be addressed. What marks off one from the other? If they are distinguishable concepts, can the tendency to merge the former in the latter be justified? Can indigenous theology be written off simply because the latter term appears to supersede it in scope? Such questions will constitute the groundwork of this study.
E. How We Shall Proceed With The Study.

The work is divided into two main sections. Part I deals with some of the problems we have mentioned surrounding the meaning and understanding of indigenous theology. The intention firstly is to try and clarify some of these issues in order to be able to establish a case for the possibility and necessity of Indigenous Theology. An attempt to redefine indigenous theology would be necessary. Also criteria for a christian indigenous theology would need to be formulated.

Having completed this groundwork, the way may be open for an attempt to resolve the questions we have asked concerning Song and Koyama’s theological programs. Whether or not they can be seen to be doing indigenous theology would be decided on the basis of our investigation in this first section (Part I).

Chapter 1 seeks to put things in perspective by looking at the history of the concept; its origin and background. Examination of the nature of indigenization and the process by which it is carried out in the context of the Church’s mission would afford us with an understanding of the broad outlines of what indigenous theology entails.

Chapter 2 discusses the trends of indigenization in Asia. This is deemed necessary by the fact that the focus of our investigation is on two Asian theologians. Not only that, but Asia seems to afford us with some earlier examples of indigenous theologising in modern history.
Chapter 3 examines some of the main issues involved in current discussions of the topic. Three main ones are treated: the necessity of indigenous theologising, the meaning of indigenous theology and its legitimacy as an approach to the task of theology in relation to cultures. Chapter 4 discusses the problems and limits of indigenous theology. Two most common problems are identified as firstly syncretism and secondly the primacy of culture over the gospel. Regarding criteria for judging Christian indigenous theology, proposals previously made by others would be reviewed in order to help us in our own formulation.

Part II will engage us in an analysis of the works of Song and Koyama respectively. The approach here would be by way of examining a number of themes which in our view represent an attempt to do indigenous theology. Selection of themes is based firstly on the frequency with which they are treated in Song and Koyama’s writings. Secondly they are selected on the basis of their connection with the main concerns of the authors themselves.

A similar organizational format would be used in the examination of first Song and then Koyama. Each would begin with an introductory chapter to the person concerned. A series of chapters, each on a particular theme, would then follow. A final chapter would attempt to relate the theology of each of Song and Koyama to the question of indigenous theology.
PART I: INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. A Question of Origin.

Exactly where, when and by whom the adjective "indigenous" was first predicated to "theology" so that together they came to represent a separate approach to the Christian task of articulating its faith is a question that cannot be answered with absolute certainty. Trying to put a date, place or name on the precise origin of the concept has been like looking for a needle in a haystack. In any case, the question in itself involves an innate difficulty which precludes us from giving a straightforward answer. It has often been said that indigenizing theology is an activity which, strictly speaking, is not something done apart, but rather an essential function of theology itself.¹ If this is so, then it follows that all theologies throughout the history of Christianity (including the New Testament authors themselves) can be said to be indigenous theologies.² Thus by implication, two assumptions can be made about indigenous theology.

First, it may not be inappropriate at all to place the origin of the concept within the earliest period of church

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history. But the validity of this assumption is obviously questionable. For, neither the theologies of the early part of Christian history were ever regarded and understood by early Christians as "indigenous", nor were the early theologians themselves conscious of their "doing" theology as such. Hence to try and place the origin of the concept in the milieu of the early Christian church would be anachronistic and therefore mistaken. It would be a case of historical "eisegesis", that is, reading into the past something that was never intended to be there originally.

Secondly, it would not be wrong to assume that the practice of indigenizing theology had already been in action long before it was labelled as such. Thus even if the term "indigenous" was not applied to theology during the early centuries of Christian history, it could be said that indigenous theology had already come to existence somewhat inadvertently.

The difficulty surrounding the question of origin of "indigenous theology" becomes quite obvious when we glance at the reference literature where the relevant information is likely to be found. To mention only a few, A Dictionary of Christian Theology - first published only in 1969 - does not mention the concept at all. In the 1970 publication of The Concise Dictionary of Christian World Mission, we find


references only to 'indigenous churches', 'indigenous missionaries', 'indigenous missions', but not 'indigenous theology'. Only with the appearance of *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* and *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* in the last decade do we see the term 'indigenous theology' being dealt with as a specific topic.

While nothing is said in these sources about the exact origin of the concept, two important observations can be made on the basis of the information given. Firstly, up till the second half of this century, the idea of an 'indigenous theology' generally did not occupy as significant a place in Christian thought as were the indigenous church, indigenous missionary and indigenous mission. Talking and thinking about indigenous theology was, on the whole, bound up with talk about the Church and its missionary enterprise. Secondly, the recent entry of indigenous theology as a separate topic in theological textbooks indicates that the recognition of it as such is a relatively new thing.


6 Early this century, Roland Allen examined contemporary usage of the word "indigenous." See, "The Use of the Term 'Indigenous,'" *IRM*, Vol. 16, no. 62 (April, 1927). In this essay, he considered the most crucial question to be this: "in what sense either Christianity or the Church can be called indigenous?" (p. 262). Allen's question indirectly lends support to our observations. By stating the object of the question in terms of the 'Church' or 'Christianity' only, indicates that the application of the word 'indigenous' to 'theology' must have been a later development - later than the late 1920's. It also shows that the concept of indigenous theology is subsidiary to the indigenous principle with which the Church's mission was framed during the early 20th century.
In the light of these observations, we are led to the belief that the concept of indigenous theology is definitely a twentieth century phenomenon. Its initial association with words like missionary, church, mission, suggests that its origin lies within the context of the modern missionary movement. Its birth is consequential to the Church's mission.

Admittedly, theology as a servant of the Church does not have an independent place outside the mission of the Church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Theology, as the act of reflecting and articulating the Christian faith functions within it. It is not therefore inconceivable to conclude that indigenous theology, as an approach to the expression of the Christian message is, at least before the second half of this century, incidental to the missionary endeavour of the modern Church.

B. Mission and the Indigenous Church.

Undoubtedly, the idea of indigenous theology is intricately bound up with the spirit of evangelization which marks the second half of the nineteenth century. It is by inference inherent in the word "indigenization"; a concept in terms of which the mission of the Church has been framed throughout the modern missionary movement. This observation has been made by a number of people. e.g. M. M. Thomas, "Towards An Indigenous Christian Theology," in Asian Voices in Christian Theology, ed., Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), p. 28; also, Bruce J. Nicholls, Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1979), p. 20; Pong Nang Park, "A Theological Approach to the Understanding
appropriate principle for mission work, indigenization, came
to be "fully accepted by the Protestant world from 1890 on."

What is involved in this principle and how was it understood?

According to Stephen Neill, the word "indigenization" is
used in two senses. First it refers to the question of the
emancipation of the "younger churches", and their freedom to
develop on their own lines without rigid control from the
West. Secondly, it is the question of the relationship of a
Christian church to the non-Christian past which it had
inherited. These two senses are brought together in the
writings of mission pioneers like Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson,
Roland Allen, J. Merle Davis, Melvin Hodges, Gustav Warneck,
Bruno Gutmann and others under what they see as the goal of
mission, namely, a self-governing, self-supporting and

of the Indigenization of Christianity," NEAJT, no. 3 (1969),
pp. 106-114.

8 Stephen Neill, "Indigenization," in The Concise
et al., (London: United Society for Christian Literature,
1970), p. 275. The indigenous principle, to some, is
synonymous with the 'Nevius Method' made famous by John L.
Nevius in his publications from Shanghai in 1885. In these
writings, he strongly advocated that the new churches should
be self-supporting, not only in terms of finance, but
including the spiritual aspect and individual leadership from
within the new body of believers. See, James O. Buswell III.,
"Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method," in Theology
and Mission, ed., David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1978), p. 95. But whilst Dr Nevius may have popularized
the indigenous principle, the actual discovery and usage of
it, at least in theory, is identified with Henry Venn who is
today known as a "father of the 'indigenous church' principle
(self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating)." Venn saw
this threefold formula as containing the three ingredients of
a church's integrity or feeling of self-worth. See, Wilbert
R. Shenk, "Henry Venn's Legacy," Occasional Bulletin of

self-propagating church.\textsuperscript{10}

In the great international missionary conferences since Edinburgh (1910), fervent discussions on indigenization reflect the significance of the subject in mission circles.\textsuperscript{11} The mission goal envisaged in terms of the three-self formula was considered to be a matter of great urgency for the Church. In a statement adopted by the Jerusalem International Missionary Conference (1928), part of it reads: "No more important problem confronts the older and younger churches alike than to discover the secret of a living indigenous Church."\textsuperscript{12} Clearly the establishment of the "indigenous Church" is seen as the immediate task of mission.

In order to achieve this goal, the conference adopted the concept of "partnership" between Western missions and the

\textsuperscript{10} This three-fold formula sums up the mission principles of these men. While the theological starting points of their mission theories may have differed, they all share the vision of the 'autonomous' or 'native' church. This is the goal of mission. See, To Apply The Gospel: Selections From the Writings of Henry Venn, ed., Max Warren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971); Peter Beyerhaus & Henry Lefever, The Responsible Church and the Foreign Mission, (London: World Dominion, 1964); Roland Allen, The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, 3rd ed. (London: World Dominion, 1956); Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1962); Melvin Hodges, The Indigenous Church, (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing, 1953).


younger churches. According to Jerald Gort, this new relationship of partnership reflects two growing convictions among Christians: One, church and mission are inseparable; mission is never finished for it belongs of the very being of the Church. Two, mission should not be regarded as an overseas endeavour of the Western churches but the task of the whole church. Missionary imperialism, paternalism, superiority complexes must therefore be removed. And the formation of a 'living indigenous church' which the conference takes to be its main objective has to be a shared responsibility for all Christian Churches.

As to the nature of such a church, the statement goes on to say that a church is seen to be "living" and "indigenous," when its interpretation of Christ and its expression in worship and service, in customs and in art and architecture incorporate the worthy characteristics of the people, while conserving at the same time the heritage of the church in all lands and in all ages. When through it, the Spirit of Jesus Christ influences all phases of life, bringing to his service all the potentialities of both men and women... When it actively shares its life with the nation in which it finds itself... When it is alert to the problems of the times and as a spiritual force in the community, courageously and sympathetically makes its contribution to its solution.

Similarly, at the Tambaram International Missionary Council (1938), the Statement of that Council has this to say:

An indigenous church, young or old, in the East or in the West, is a church which, rooted in obedience to Christ, spontaneously uses forms of thought and modes of action natural and familiar in its own environment. Such a church arises in response to

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14 IMC Report, Jerusalem Meeting, ibid., p. 208.
Christ's own call... But every younger church will seek further to bear witness to the same Gospel with new tongues also; that is, in a direct, clear and close relationship with the cultural and religious heritage of its own country... From these description of an indigenous church, it becomes apparent that the idea of indigenization of mission involves two basic requirements. It involves firstly a fidelity to the universal christian faith rooted in God through Jesus Christ, and secondly, a sympathetic awareness and a mindfulness of the local situation in which the response to that faith is to be expressed. This means that on the one hand, the indigenous church must remain obedient to Jesus Christ and faithful to the Christian heritage. On the other, she must seek to interpret and express the Christian faith through "forms of thought and modes of action natural and familiar in her own environment." These two aspects constitute the fundamentals of a living indigenous church.

C. Nature of Indigenization.

We have seen that the principle of indigenization had, by 1890 become fully accepted by the Protestant Churches. But acceptance is one thing; the actual process of working towards the avowed goal of a 'living indigenous church' and its realization is another. This is well reflected in the progress of western mission overseas even up to the fourth decade of this century. Peter Beyerhaus, writing about "Indigenous

churches" says,

the churches of Asia and Africa which have come into being as a result of the modern missionary enterprise, have since the beginning of the twentieth century been demanding indigenization.\textsuperscript{16}

For Asians and Africans to make this demand even after twenty years since adopting indigenization as a missionary principle suggests that there was some dissatisfaction with its procedure and operation. That this is so is verifiable by the reasons for the demand.

Beyerhaus identifies three major sources of the demand for indigenization. The first is the experience of the Western missionaries themselves. They realize that because they as human individuals as well as their proclamation have been conditioned by the atmosphere of their home country, they and their ministry have a foreign character which is bound to make it appear unassimilable in the eyes of the indigenous people.

Second, there is the German missionary thinking with its idea of the "people's church" as the goal of the missionary endeavour. People like Karl Graul and Gustav Warneck demand that missionary work should lead to the creation of independent indigenous churches which, from the point of view of social structure and culture, should be built up on the basis of the ethnic structure of the people among whom missionary work is being carried out and in close relationship to its inherited cultural values. Thirdly, many Christians particularly in Africa and Asia (in many cases influenced by

anti-western reaction of coloured nationalism) feel that they have been culturally estranged as a result of missionary teaching and strategies.\footnote{ibid., pp. 276-7. See also Stephen Neill, op. cit., p. 275.}

Underlying this desire for indigenization is a five-fold concern: (1) That missionary operation should take into account the traditional sociological structure which emphasizes social relationships rather than religious individualism that is characteristic of the Western worldview. (2) An ecclesiastical organization modelled and worked out in accordance with the socio-economic standards of the indigenous community with which local Christians may be able to identify. (3) Affirmation of the indigenous culture as a form for the proclamation of the Christian message. (4) Use of the mother tongue for preaching, cultural exchange and instruction. (5) Relating the proclamation of the gospel, teaching and confessional expression to the thought-forms, and experiences expressed in the traditional philosophy and religion of the area.\footnote{ibid., p. 277.}

These factors underlying the demand for indigenization give us a clue to the nature of indigenization. Understood in the context of mission and in terms of the relationship between the Older Churches of the West and the Younger Churches which emerged as a result of the former's missionary endeavours, indigenization refers, on the one hand, to the desire of the younger churches to become independent of the
western founding churches. It speaks of a growing need among the former to be their own masters in matters of church administration and organization. It points to the demand of the younger churches to become autonomous; to attain recognition and an identity of their own. It is a desire to become themselves; a "church" in their own right.

Devadutt has described this desire as the "urge for self-expression of one growing to maturity." It is the urge of a church which has come of age, to propagate itself in its own locality. An urge which necessitates a replanning of her inner life in all its manifestations - thought, language, worship, proclamation, evangelism, witness, etc - with a view to sifting the permanent elements of the Faith from its Western cultural accretions and discovering forms which would more readily rouse the soul to adoration than those at present obtaining. An urge which recognizes the need for freedom to develop in ways which would insure their being truly rooted in their own cultures. And in so doing, they might be delivered from the curse of the debilitating isolation from national life under which so many of the younger churches were suffering.

On the other hand, indigenization also involves the recognition by the Western Churches of the need for Christian mission and its proclamation of the gospel to take seriously the various dimensions of life - cultural, social, political,


20 Jerald D. Gort, loc. cit.,
economic, religious, etc - of the people toward whom mission is being directed. The demand for indigenization indicates the realization by the western churches of the necessity to set the proclamation of the church free from the traditional western form in which it seems repulsive to hearers, and to present it, clothed afresh in Asian or African form, so as to appear intelligible and relevant to both Christian and non-Christian hearers. It denotes the task of the Church, in all its various aspects - structure, organization, worship, liturgy, preaching, teaching, etc - to become rooted in the cultural context of its mission, yet remaining true to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the faith tradition as handed down from Apostolic times.

D. Process of Indigenization.

Indigenization is a process word. Etymologically, it derives from the root word, "indigenous" (Latin - 'indigena') which has the basic meaning of "taking root in the soil," "growing out of the natural environment," "native," as opposed to foreign or exotic. Indigenization therefore describes the process by which Christianity seeks to take root in particular cultural soils.

As we have already noted, such a process is necessitated by a conviction borne out of the missionary experience of both

the 'older' and 'younger' churches that by making the Gospel culturally compatible and relevant frees it from the status of being foreign and alien - a stumbling block to its acceptance. There is also the realization that in order to communicate the truth of the Christian message in another historical context, it has to be somehow translated into relevant terms and intelligible forms of expression. If the meaning of Christ is to be understood at all, it has to be expressed in ways that fit in well with the recipient’s frames of reference - cultural, philosophical and religious.

Real indigenization, according to Kaj Baago,

means the crossing of the borderline. It means leaving, if not bodily at least spiritually, Western Christianity and the westernized Christian Church ... and moving into another religion, another culture, taking only Christ with oneself. Indigenization is evangelization. It is the planting of the gospel inside another culture, another philosophy and another religion.22

What the statement suggests is that essentially, the process of indigenization has to do with the Christian approach to the task of spreading the Good News cross-culturally. It has to do basically with the communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people outside the orbit of the Christian faith. At the heart of indigenization therefore is the perennial question of the relationship between Gospel and culture.

In the history of modern mission, the process of indigenization has been described in different ways. Numerous terms have been employed for this purpose. Accommodation, adaptation, inculturation, transformation, contextualization,

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are some examples - to mention only a few. Since some of these terms are used either as synonyms or substitutes for indigenization, sometimes confusion becomes inevitable.\textsuperscript{23} For the sake of clarification, it would therefore seem necessary to examine some of the operative models by which the indigenization of the Gospel has been approached.

1. Models of Indigenization.

The first model is that of accommodation. This approach has generally been the most preferable among Roman Catholic circles. It has been used as a model for indigenizing the Gospel with the desired goal of Christianity eventually becoming "the very heart and nerve centre of culture."\textsuperscript{24} In Louis Luzbetak's definition, accommodation is viewed as, 

the respectful, prudent, scientifically and theologically sound adjustment of the church to the native culture in attitude, outward behaviour, and practical apostolic approach.\textsuperscript{25}

Accommodation involves a double movement: the church accommodates to the local culture and the new Christian

\textsuperscript{23} The use of the terms "adapt" and "accommodate" in the Vatican II document Ad Gentes, par. 22. shows that they are synonymous with indigenization. See Walter M. Abbott, The Documents of Vatican II, (New York: The American Press, 1966), pp. 612-13. In contrast, 'contextualization' (a term coined in 1972 by Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian, directors of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches) as it is used in TEF publications, suggests that it is to be taken not as a synonym of indigenization but rather as a substitute for it. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.


\textsuperscript{25} ibid., p. 341.
community accommodates to the church. The object of accommodation is the total culture: the physical, social, and ideational adaptation of a society and everything the total life-way embraces. The church is to penetrate the total "cultural organism" - its subsystems which in turn consist of interwebbed elements: meanings, usages and functions which may include clothing, family life, trade, government, law, philosophy, magic and mythology, science, language and ritual.

As a model of indigenization, accommodation is simply the adoption of those components of culture which would express and enhance the acceptance of the Gospel by a host culture. It is the synthesis of Christian values with those of a receiving society. This generally positive attitude toward culture has its theological underpinnings in the classic statement of Thomas Aquinas that,

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\text{since, therefore, grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural inclination of the will ministers to charity.}
\]

Christ or the Gospel, according to the Thomist view, is the perfector of culture, the fulfilment of a culture's aspirations. Hence, Luzbetak sees the responsibility of the Christian missionary as being more than just detecting and condemning sin and evil - "the darkness of sin and the night

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26 ibid., p. 346.

27 ibid., pp. 346-7.

of heathenism" - in a local culture. Missionary calling is also a call to discern and affirm what is good in a culture: that is, "to make the beautiful in the so-called pagan heart even more beautiful, to seek out the naturally good in order to make it supernaturally perfect."^{29}

In the New Testament, Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Athens is seen as a clear case of accommodating the Gospel message to the thought forms of a pagan culture. In Acts 17:28, Paul describes the character of God by means of two quotations - "In him we live and move and have our being," and "For we also are his offspring" - taken from pagan poets and referring to Zeus, the chief of the Greek gods.^{30} By utilizing these statements Paul recognized the element of truth in them because they described the character of the Christian God.

A second model for indigenization is 'adaptation'. This one differs from accommodation in that it does not seek to assimilate cultural elements but to express the Gospel through familiar cultural forms and ideas. Hendrik Kraemer,^{31} who advocated this approach, recognizes the imperfection of man's effort to solve moral and religious problems but at the same time he sees the need to move within given cultural patterns.

^{29} Louis Luzbetak, op. cit., p. 36.

^{30} The first line is believed to be from Epimenides which was probably imitated by Callimachus in his Hymn to Zeus and the second is from Aratus who may have borrowed it from a similar expression in Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus. See F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 359-60.

Kraemer contends that Paul and John in the first century did not accommodate the Gospel message to cultural elements; nor did they refute these. John used the Logos idea to express the truth of the incarnation, and Paul employed terminology of the mystery religions to depict the opposite character of the Christian religion.\(^{32}\)

In Second Corinthians 3: 18, Paul speaks of believers as reflecting the glory of the Lord being changed from one glory to another. Here, Paul may have borrowed from the Greek mystery religions the concepts of 'henosis' and 'apotheosis.' It is to be noted, however, that in doing so, Paul expresses the opposite idea, for Christians do not become God or Christ; neither do they partake of divine glory by human achievement.\(^{33}\) According to Kraemer, Paul in this case "does not bother about making contacts or building bridges, but he is entirely absorbed in expressing the truth and so reveals gulfs and bridges at the same time ..." The goal of adaptation is a "genuine translation of Christianity into indigenous terms so that its relevancy to their concrete situations becomes evident."\(^{34}\)

A third approach to the relationship between Gospel and culture is 'possessio'. This concept is popularized in the mission theory of J. H. Bavinck\(^{35}\) and defended today by

\(^{32}\) ibid., pp. 309ff.

\(^{33}\) ibid., p. 311.

\(^{34}\) ibid., p. 323.

Peter Beyerhaus is the classic Reformation position which, unlike the Roman Catholic view (accommodation), considers culture negatively. "The deepest ground of this difference," says Bavinck, "lies in an entirely different judgment of heathenism." Grounded on the Thomistic concept of nature and grace, the Roman Catholic notion assumes that the heathen is able to do a great deal that is good in the natural sphere and that "he can also reach a certain knowledge of God which although insufficient is nevertheless not necessarily wrong in every respect."  

The Reformation view affirms that "the whole man, in his thinking, as well as his life, has been affected by sin in every respect." Thus, as the core of culture and underlying all spheres of group life, pagan religions do not contain much that is beneficial.

The Christian approach to social groups and culture therefore is one of 'possessio', that is, taking possession. Possessio is the dynamic process by which "God the Father puts his creation in the power of the Holy Spirit under the dominion of his Son, as its sovereign ruler."  


37 J. H. Bavinck, ibid., p. 172.

38 ibid.,

39 ibid., p. 173.

40 Peter Beyerhaus, ibid., p. 134.

41 ibid., p. 119.
This process includes three stages. Firstly, in the history of biblical revelation and Christian mission, God invades the world of nations and establishes bridgeheads of elected communities. In the second stage, the elected communities serve as the instruments for the progressive reconquest of the whole ethnic and cultural territory which they represent. The third stage lies in the future when Satan and death will be overthrown.  

Despite their seemingly negative view of culture, the proponents of possessio are unable to evade the role of culture in the process of indigenizing the Gospel. For when the biblical message is transmitted into the realm of a different culture, this culture necessarily will have to provide the material elements in which it will be embodied.

In the history of biblical faith, a certain degree of assimilation and adaptation of elements from the cultural and religious environment was practised, but extreme care was exercised to preserve the faith. This was achieved by a threefold process of 'selection,' 'rejection' and 'reinterpretation.' Biblical faith was expressed in the categories, symbols, ideas, and practices of human religions in general; however, only those which were compatible with biblical revelation were retained. The principle of selection implies ruling out or rejecting all elements in heathen

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42 ibid., p. 120.
43 ibid., p. 135.
44 ibid., p. 136.
culture which do not conform to biblical faith. The practice of sacred prostitution, for instance, was condemned in the Old Testament, and the Israelites were exhorted to reject it. But rejection cannot be the final step; otherwise, it leaves a vacuum. Hence, possessio is completed by reinterpretation and re-dedication. After being purified, the elements of a culture are to be invested with new meaning and usage. The term "metamorphosis" is a case in point. In the Hellenistic mystery religions, it meant a physical penetration of the initiate by the nature of the god through a ritual. According to Beyerhaus, Paul adopted the concept but filled it with a new concept: that of moral transformation and conformity with Christ.45

A fourth approach to the cultural situation of the gospel is "transformation," identified with the views of its chief proponent, Charles Kraft. Kraft's position is a modification of H. Richard Niebuhr's concept of "Christ above culture."46 Kraft conceives of God "above culture but through culture". Culture, says Kraft, is

basically a vehicle or milieu, neutral in essence though manifesting in practice the pervasive influence of human sinfulness. Culture is not, therefore, in and of itself an enemy or a friend to God or to man, but rather, something which though man is inextricably immersed therein, is there to be used by personal beings such as man, God and

45 ibid., p. 139.

46 Richard Niebuhr outlines three positions in the relation of Christ to culture: (1) Christ against culture; (2) Christ of culture; (3) Christ above culture (includes Christ transforming culture). See H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, (London: Faber & Faber, 1951).
Satan. 47

Kraft maintains that although God is above culture, God employs it to interact with man. Luzbetak and Kraft agree on the essence of culture as religiously neutral; however, Kraft recognizes "the pervasiveness of the expression of human sinfulness manifested in and through culture." 48 It is when transformation takes place on a personal level through relationship with God that change occurs in the socio-cultural sphere. The transformation that Kraft envisions is not merely superficial external change, but "change in the central conceptualization (world view) of a culture." 49

The world view of a culture is a "control box" of that culture. It serves as the basis for explaining the workings of a society and for validating its values and goals. It interprets and orders a culture’s perception of reality into a comprehensive system. Kraft believes that the transformation of a culture’s world view is accomplished by "bringing Christian understandings of supracultural truth to bear on the conceptual system of a culture" 50 through reinterpretation and adoption of a new (Christian) outlook on reality.

A more recent approach to the indigenization of the Gospel is the one which has come to be known as 'contextualization'. The word was coined by the directors of


48 Ibid., p. 114.

49 Ibid., p. 339.

50 Ibid., p. 404.
the Theological Education Fund (TEF) and was popularized through TEF publications: *Ministry in Context* (1972) and *Learning in Context* (1973). The TEF's Third Mandate called for radical reform in theological education in response to the rapid socio-cultural changes and the need for liberation and development in many Third World countries. Its dominant goal is expressed in a key passage which urges that the Gospel be expressed and ministry be undertaken in response to:

a) the widespread crisis of faith, and the search for meaning in life; b) the issues of social justice and human development, and c) the dialectic between local cultural and religious situations and a universal technological civilization.

It was during this quest for renewal in theological education that TEF director Shoki Coe came upon the concept of contextualization, which includes the words 'context' and 'contextuality.'

By context, Coe explains, "I mean historical realities of each situation, all of which are subject to change." 54

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53 Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education," *Theological Education*, 9 (Summer 1973), p. 239.

54 ibid., p. 238.
These historic realities may be folk traditions, the classical culture, the impact of technology and modernization upon the classical culture, and the social and political milieu with which the church is to be in dialogue. Contextuality is defined as,

that critical assessment of what makes the context really significant in the light of Missio Dei. It is the missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it. It is the conscientization of the contexts in the particular, historic moment, assessing the peculiarity of the context in the light of the mission of the church as it is called to participate in Mission Dei.\(^55\)

"Critical assessment," "missiological discernment," "conscientization of the contexts" - these are the crucial points involved in contextuality.

Conscientization is the process of awakening the consciousness of people to the misery of their plight on the one hand, and to the possibility for their liberation and personal well-being on the other. Its goal is to enable people fully to realize their dignity as persons. Conscientization also includes the ability "to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality."\(^56\) In the midst of revolutionary situations, the church is urged to be aware and to critically discern (contextuality) historical developments as these point (sign of the times) to "where God is at work". Having discerned where God is at work in the welter of forces

\(^{55}\) ibid., p. 241.

operating in given situations, there, according to the
documents of the World Council of Churches, the church must
participate in Missio Dei.  

In the light of conclusions arrived at in Uppsala and
Bangkok, it seems that the World Council of Churches would
affirm the following in regard to the question of the "signs
of the times", that is, which events should be interpreted as
pointing in the direction that God is moving? First, God is
at work in the world through the forces of modernization,
secularization, social and political revolutions, and in the
longing for social justice and economic freedom. Second, God
is at work at the point where traditional and new values are

57 It must be pointed out that in WCC documents since mid
1960s, a radical shift in the ecumenical understanding of the
church's mission is clearly reflected. Traditional evangelism
and church growth were no longer regarded as the primary goals
of missions; rather the new focus was on humanization and
liberation. The Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) attests to
this by its emphasis on the renewal in mission. See, "Renewal
28-52. Uppsala considered the traditional goals of missions
as past-oriented and "transitory forms of obedience to the
Missio Dei." The ultimate end of mission is "the establishment
of shalom" which "involves the realization of the full
potentialities of all creation and its ultimate reconciliation
and unity in Christ." Uppsala interpreted the world-wide
longings for justice and freedom as the "signs of the times,"
pointing in the direction where God was moving in history. A
point of interest here is to note that after Uppsala, the WCC
dropped the "s" from "missions" and thereafter the use of
"mission" (from West to East to South) expressed the "growing
consensus that mission is one for the church wherever it may
1969), pp. 141-144.

The WCC Commission of World Mission and Evangelism in
Bangkok (1972) enlarged on the emphases of the Uppsala
Assembly. Under the theme "Salvation Today" Bangkok
reinterpreted "salvation", emphasizing its social and
political dimensions. See, "Salvation and Social Justice,"
198-201.
in conflict. Third, God is present in the resurgence of traditional religions as the anonymous or cosmic Christ. Now since, as the World Council of Churches affirms, God is active in history through the variety of upheavals, the church is to be "where God is," participating in dialogue with other religions, supporting liberation movements, and proclaiming a relevant message.

Conscientization, which comes only from involvement and participation should produce the ability to respond and to contextualize the gospel. Thus, according to Coe, contextuality (the critical assessment of the missiological significance of events) and contextualization, though distinct, cannot be separated. Contextualization "takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of nations in the Third World." 58

A sixth approach to the indigenization of the gospel is that of 'inculturation', a concept which originated with the work of Professor G. Linwood Barney of the Alliance Graduate School of Theology and Mission. 59 At the basis of this approach is the presupposition that in any communication of the Gospel message, the witness (missionary) is handling a

58 TEF, Ministry in Context, p. 20

message that is 'supracultural' (= non-cultural) in two different cultural media - his/her own and that of the receiver. Inculturation then, is understood as,

the process of disengaging the supracultural element of the gospel from one culture and contextualizing them within the cultural forms and social institutions of another, with at least some degree of transformation of those forms and institutions.  

Barney affirmed that the supracultural can find adequate and meaningful forms of expression in any culture. In introducing the term inculturation, Buswell quotes him as saying:

The essential nature of these supracultural components should neither be lost nor distorted but rather secured and interpreted clearly through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in 'inculturating' them into this new culture.  

He then makes a threefold distinction vital to the thesis and method of contextualization as he employs a middle category between the supracultural absolutes and the cultural relativities:

God is absolute, underived and unchanging. But consider the following implications. The Gospel is given of God. Therefore it is derived. It cannot be absolute. Is it relative? If so, it is changeable. Yet Paul in Galatians speaks of the one Gospel. We need another conceptual category between absolute and relative. It would seem that the term 'constant' might meet this need. Constant refers to that which, by nature, does not change though it may be derived ... Then it follows, God is absolute. That which He initiates and affirms to man in His covenant and redeeming acts is constant; however, the forms in which man responds to God are tied to his culture and therefore are relative. The absolute and the constant are supracultural but man's response is relative and thus can vary from

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61 ibid.
culture to culture as each society expresses the supracultural in forms peculiar to its own cultural configuration. 62

Thus, what Barney envisages in adopting the inculturation approach is a relevant expression of the God-human relationship (Gospel) that can preserve the integrity of a culture but in no way needing to compromise the essence and nature of the supracultural.

Inculturation is emphasized by its advocates because it denotes precisely that which is intended by the usage of similar terms like transculturation, incarnation, and all the others we have already mentioned. Buswell, for example, favours it because he thinks inculturation is aptly comparable to established anthropological terminology such as "enculturation" and "acculturation." 63

2. Ethnotheology as Indigenization.

Contemporary interest in the non-western world and in "primitive" societies has led to the emergence of new specialized studies such as ethnohistory, ethnomusicology, ethnolinguistics and other 'ethno' studies. On the whole,

62 ibid.,

63 'Enculturation' means the socialization of a person within his own culture or the process by which a human infant becomes culturally nourished through interaction with its human environment. 'Acculturation' is the process of culture change resulting from the contact of two or more cultures, and the state of changed cultural characteristics or traits of a person or a society which has sustained the impact of such a process. For a good discussion of these (and similar) terms, see Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), pp. 4-16.
these specialized disciplines approach their subject matter from a cross-cultural or non-western perspective. Kraft believes that in the light of recent trends in cross-cultural studies, Christians should pursue a discipline called "Christian ethnotheology" which would combine understandings from Christian theology and anthropology while maintaining "an interpretive approach to the study of God, man, and divine-human interaction." Kraft proposes that such a study may draw from theology insights to eternal (absolute) truths related to various areas, and from anthropology, cultural (relative) truths concerning these areas.

James O. Buswell III, in agreement with Kraft points out that "ethnotheology" is an eminently appropriate term for the contextualization (indigenization) of theology. This suggestion is based on the discovery of existing anthropological parallels. Buswell observes that ethnotheology parallels Kenneth Pike's "emic" or "internal" approach to the study of behaviour. Quoting Pike,

The 'etic' viewpoint studies behaviour as from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The 'emic' viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system ...

Buswell highlights the distinction which Pike makes between the "external approach" and the "internal approach" to

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65 ibid.,
66 James O. Buswell, op. cit., p. 97.
67 ibid., p. 98.
behaviour. The former studies behaviour as from outside of a particular system. In contrast, the second approach understands behaviour from inside the system. The first perspective uses criteria external to the system (e.g., doing theology in a Third World culture using western philosophical categories), while the second provides an internal view with criteria derived from within the system and which are therefore relevant to the internal functioning of the system itself.

Applying Pike's "internal approach," Buswell proposes that Christian ethnotheology formulate Christian truth in and through a particular culture so that the former is rendered from inside the system. This requires that Christian truth be communicated in the linguistic idioms and forms of a host culture. The forms may include order, customs of validation and assertion; styles of emphasis and expression. Ethnotheology then is the attempt to root Christian concepts within a particular cultural system and to express

68 ibid.,
them according to the dynamics of that system. The rationale for the blending of theology and anthropology in Christian ethnotheology lies in two points. First, the locus of the divine-human interaction is in culture. God's action in Jesus Christ is both supracultural (outside culture but expressed in culture) and transcultural (transmitted across cultures). Moreover, human response to God's action is within and through culture (cultural). Since the supracultural is capable of expression in any culture, the Christian community in a new culture should be encouraged to "develop its own cultural forms for a meaningful expression of the supernatural: its new Faith, the communication of the Gospel, its common life as a people of God, etc." In the second place, given the fact that God and man interact within culture, anthropology provides helpful insights for understanding the presuppositions of a culture; acquaintance with these presuppositions aids in effective communication. Speaking to the point, Kraft believes that anthropological techniques are ... needed by evangelical theology ... for interpreting sympathetically and with balance within the cultural context, and for effectively transferring

69 It should be noted that while it is essential that Christian ethnotheology be done from within a culture (following Pike's "emic" approach), the Gospel - introduced as an external system - provides both the distinctive content and normative theological framework by which the new theological formulations are to be shaped. It is in this sense that the Christian message as an external system influences the host culture.

meanings (rather than forms) from one culture to another.\textsuperscript{71}

The following examples by Kraft indicate how understandings from Christian theology and from anthropology may be synthesized in Christian ethnotheology: (i) In theology, it is understood that 'God created humankind.' In anthropology, the understanding is that 'People of each culture create their god(s) as an idealization of themselves.' In ethnotheological understanding, 'God created humankind. Human beings perceive God in terms meaningful to their culture. Thus human perceptions will always be influenced by culture and sin.' (ii) Theological understanding: 'God reveals Godself to humanity'; Anthropological understanding: 'Man thinks he receives communication from a supernatural source'; Ethnotheological understanding: 'God reveals Godself in terms appropriate to man's cultural perception.' (iii) Theology: Humanity is pervasively sinful and in need of redemption; Anthropology: Man is the product of his culture; Ethnotheology: Culture is the vehicle of Satan as well as God. Man and culture pervasively sinful and needing redemption.\textsuperscript{72}

The goal of Christian ethnotheology is an integrated view of God, humanity and culture. The values of drawing insights from anthropology and Christian theology for ethnotheology are summarized by Kraft in the following words:


By drawing insights from both theology and anthropology Christian ethnotheology may arrive at conclusions concerning both the relativity of culture and the essential oneness of mankind, including his lostness in sin in spite of the cultural differences in perceptions and expressions of this sinfulness. Drawing from theology alone our discipline may arrive at conclusions regarding God's provision for man's need and the supracultural condition (i.e. faith) for meeting that need. We then turn to anthropology for the techniques of cross-cultural communication of this supracultural message in terms meaningful within the hearer's culture.73

Christian ethnotheology presents a fruitful approach to intelligible presentation of biblical truth and reflection upon the Christian faith within a frontier or new cultural situation. Consciousness of the cultural relativity of techniques and approaches should guard a theologian or a given Christian community against absolutizing these in a cross-cultural setting. Since God interacts with humanity in and through human cultures, communicators of Christian truth should consider every culture as a valid and adequate vehicle through which the supracultural God makes his will known to all peoples.


The concern to indigenize the biblical message involves a consideration of the church's relation to culture. This relation is always one of tension. Paul's statement about Christians being "in" the world yet not "of" this world points to this tension. So long as the church is in the world but not

73 ibid., p. 124.
of it, it will sustain a relation of continuity and discontinuity with culture.

Based on the biblical data, it would seem to me that three general statements could be made about humanity and culture. First, the Bible views culture positively and negatively. The cultural mandate, given by God at creation - Genesis 1. 28: ("Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over ... every living thing ..." ) - has remained intact even after the Fall. The development of art, manufacture, the institution of the family and human governments fulfil this mandate. Human creativity in culture reflects the Imago Dei in humanity.

Second, though culture indeed reflects the creativity of the human spirit as the bearer of the divine image, there is nevertheless the element of ugliness, moral perversion and self-destruction in human culture due to sin or what Koyama typically calls the power of the 'unclean spirit'. This is explained by the fact that humanity is estranged from God the Creator. Because humanity is self-seeking and rebellious against God, culture will never be morally neutral; it will continually reflect both truth and error, beauty and ugliness, good and evil. As the Lausanne Covenant affirms: "Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he has fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic."\(^{74}\)

Third, divine revelation - which culminated at the incarnation - was set in and expressed through culture. Moreover, the biblical material also indicates that human response to God will always be within and in terms of human understanding that is largely informed and molded by the cultural context.

Culture then is a vehicle through which the Gospel and the church are continually expressed in concrete terms. Culture, defined by Paul Hiebert as "the integrated system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a society," provides the means and forms by which the gospel message may be made intelligible. But whilst this is true, Hiebert warns against the danger of identifying culture with the gospel. Christians must "recognize that there is a fundamental difference" between the two and this distinction must be kept in mind. Since culture is relative, none can therefore embody the fullness of the christian gospel. Neither can any culture claim to have monopoly over the truth of the gospel.

Each culture, by virtue of its human foundations and 'social constructs' stands on the same par with every other

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75 Paul Hiebert's definition assumes a linkage between culture and behaviour. Culture incorporates: (1) patterns of learned behaviour or "cultural forms"; (2) meanings associated with those forms, and (3) integration of those patterns into a set of assumptions which amount to a "world-view". For Hiebert, the key word in this definition is "pattern". No idea, no behaviour, no object in itself constitutes culture. It is the pattern behind sets of these which he emphasizes. Paul G. Hiebert, "The Gospel and Culture," in The Gospel and Islam, ed., Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, Calif: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Centre, (1979), pp. 58-65.

76 ibid., p. 62.
culture. Since cultures belong intrinsically to the nature of fallen humanity, it always stands under divine judgement of the Gospel. Because culture contains both good and evil elements, the Christian is faced perennially with the need to examine, utilize or reject or transform cultural forms in the process of response to the Gospel and in obedience to Christ. It is the realization of this need for critical assessment of culture which is expressed in Stephen Knapp's words concerning contextualization (indigenization). It is, he says:

the dynamic process through which the church continually challenges and/or incorporates transforms elements of the cultural and social milieu of which it is an integral part in its daily struggle to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ in its life and mission in the world.  

The process of indigenization therefore lays a double responsibility on the part of the Christian seeking to proclaim the gospel in a different context from that of the biblical writers. In the first place, the Christian has to convey the meaning of the Christian message in thought-forms and cultural patterns of a particular culture in order for the message to be understood. At the same time, a critical review of those cultural patterns and forms must continually be maintained if the truth of the gospel is to be preserved. Such a responsibility is never easy. Richard Niebuhr recognized this thirty years ago when he wrote: "Christian perplexity in

this area has been perennial." Even today, the attempt to hold this double responsibility in balance remains a vexing problem.

The perplexity arises from the fact that christians, while attempting to indigenize the Gospel in cultural forms, often fall into one of two extreme tendencies. The first tendency is to stress culture so uncritically that the gospel message is diluted to such a degree that one might say that the content of the gospel becomes determined by culture. The other tendency is to emphasize the absoluteness of christianity and hence the gospel in such a way that non-christian cultures are seen to be demonic and worthless - standing outside of God's redeeming Grace. Obviously if culture, as we have said, is an important vehicle for the expression of the gospel, then all cultures, regardless of their religious orientations must be regarded sympathetically and positively.

In the cross-cultural communication of the gospel, one of the difficulties involved is keeping a balanced relationship between the two. A related difficulty is the fear of obvious risks inherent in this process. But it must be remembered that in the cross-cultural communication of any message, the Christian one aside, risks are always to be expected. As a matter of fact, the whole of life itself is always a risky business; it is never risk-free. Thus if the communication of the christian gospel is a life long task of

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the Christian Church, inevitable risks cannot be avoided; they would have to be faced if real communication is to be achieved.

Indeed, errors and misinterpretations are likely to be made in the communicating process, but these must not be assumed as warranties for avoiding the issue. Wing-hung Lam has pointed out that "a mutual necessity" exists between culture and the gospel. He says,

Culture needs Christianity for enlightenment; and the Christian faith requires culture for a better interpretation. Any claim to a full expression of the Christian religion is simply blind dogmatism. 79

In other words, there is no absolute way of expressing the Christian faith. Christians must constantly be seeking ways of relating the gospel and cultures trusting that by the Light of the gospel itself and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of the gospel may eventually come to be firmly rooted in the new cultural soil.

E. Indigenization and Indigenous Theology.

Let us now draw together what we have said concerning the background of indigenous theology. We began this chapter with a consideration of the origin of the concept. Admittedly we have not been able to put our finger on the exact place, time and person(s) associated with the first use of the word. But

our failure to pin-point its exact origin does not mean that we cannot know anything important or say something worthwhile about it. Neither does it mean that we are in any way precluded from appreciating its significance for further theological deliberations or prevented from understanding its meaning and implications for the task of articulating the Christian faith.

On the history of the concept, we have advocated the view that the concept of indigenous theology has its roots in the context of mission. It is implicit in the principle of 'indigenization' adopted by the missionary endeavours of the modern Church. Indigenous theology is concomitant to the goal of mission, namely, the establishment of 'indigenous churches.' The need for self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches naturally gave rise to the need for indigenous expressions of the Christian Gospel.

Dr. Chung Song Rhee once made the assertion that "if the movement of Christian Missions is not a movement of indigenization, a thousand missionaries will not suffice and a dozen might be too many." This statement highlights the significance of indigenization in missionary thinking. It points to the conviction that rooting the Gospel in particular cultures is missiologically necessary if the Church is to be obedient to her commission to "make disciples of all nations."

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But if indigenization is essential to the mission of the Church, then it is also a theological necessity.

As we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, since theological reflection is an integral part of the missionary task of the church, it follows therefore that the indigenization in mission would mean indigenization in theology too. That this is so is confirmed by Bong Rin Ro when he pointed out that the "emphasis on indigenous methods in missions was carried over into the area of theology." 81

We have noted that in the history of modern christian mission, the fundamental concern underlying the demand for indigenization focuses on the relationship between gospel and culture. In describing this relationship, various terms have been suggested. Similarly a variety of models have been adopted to give an adequate formulation to the process of indigenization. In the opinion of this writer, no single model represents what may be deemed "the" correct one. None can be said to be comprehensive enough to be able to remove all the difficulties involved. Each model has both strengths and weaknesses. What needs to be emphasized however, is that in the effort to formulate an indigenous theology, some degree of adjustment, adaptation, selection, rejection, reinterpretation and transformation of cultural elements is necessary. In other words, it is worth utilizing the insights from each of the models, provided great care is taken so that biblical truth and the essential core of the Christian gospel are safeguarded.

81 Bong Rin Ro, ibid., p. 49.
As to what an indigenous theology may entail, the insights we have gained so far in regard to the nature of the "indigenous church" and the process of indigenization provide us with important clues. Simply put, it may be viewed as an approach to the Christian task of expressing the gospel in a different cultural setting. Fundamentally, indigenous theology has to do with a way of expressing the Christian faith that takes seriously the cultural forms and patterns of life and thought that are congenial to a particular people or culture. It is a theological method by means of which indigenous thought-forms and values of religious experience in different cultures are employed and utilized in expressing the message of the Gospel for the indigenous people.

Presupposed in the attempt to indigenize theology is the need for the Christian faith to be truly understood in particular cultural contexts. Theological reflection and expression of the content of the Christian faith rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ need to be rooted in the historical situation of those by whom and for whom the reflection is done in order for faith understanding to happen.
CHAPTER 2: ASIAN TRENDS OF INDIGENIZATION.

What we attempt to do in this chapter is a general survey of the trends of indigenization in Asia since the turn of the century. Considering the vastness of the Asian region, it will obviously be impossible to carry out a country-by-country survey. Nor will it be possible to give a full coverage of all the main trends of theological indigenization within the space of this chapter. Hence we shall limit our efforts to identifying some principal trends only, treating them by way of examples which are in our judgement, representative of Asian attempts in general. An overview of Asian theological development in general seems to be a good starting point for our enquiry.

A. Theological Developments In Asia.

Asian Christians have long been passive and uncritical recipients of ready-made theological systems transmitted from the West.¹ Consciously or unconsciously, they have been led to believe that the only valid way of "doing theology" is that which conforms to the theological systems in Europe and North America. This regrettable situation has not enhanced the intellectual and spiritual maturity of the Asian churches. Alan Geyer was thus correct when he said that,

the Aryan bias of Christian doctrine is the most serious intellectual obstacle to full ecumenical fellowship with the younger churches, to their theological creativity, and to Christian evangelism in Asia, Africa and Latin America.²

The "younger churches" lack of theological creativity in understanding and communicating the Christian faith within their particular situations has produced a type of Christianity that is alien to their cultures. This situation justifies the feeling among Asians that Christianity is a "potted plant" which has been transported from the West without being transplanted in Asian soil.³ What Hendrik Kraemer said of the younger churches half a century ago still holds true: "The 'foreignness' of Christianity as now presented by Western missions confronts the churches in Africa and the East with one of their most crucial problems."⁴

Numerous factors have contributed to this negative development. A study of the history of missions and traditional missionary methods will reveal several significant ones. The first is a faulty "monocultural system."⁵ At the height of the modern missionary movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was held by mission boards that


the churches "in the mission fields" be modelled after the churches "at home." Church architecture, hymnology, Sunday clothing, liturgy, musical instruments, and decision-making processes were brought unchanged to the younger churches and were readily adopted by the new Christians.

Mastra, a Christian leader of Bali, Indonesia, for example, reports that because the first church buildings erected in Bali under the direction of European missionaries were constructed in western style, older converts and ministers opposed the construction of new churches using Balinese artistic expression. The long practice of using the organ (introduced by British missionaries) made it difficult for many Asian congregations to accept the use of native instruments in church services. In time, Bible schools and seminaries were established and these, too, were patterned after theological schools in the west in terms of curriculum, textbooks and pedagogy. Moreover, churches were not free to govern themselves as they were controlled by foreign traditions and policies, expatriate leadership, and a foreign decision-making process.

A second factor was the cultural provincialism of missionaries who planted churches in the mission fields. The great technological achievements, affluence and sophistication of western countries bred a feeling of cultural superiority. While Christendom was identified with western civilization, non-western cultures were deemed to be pagan, demonic and

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hence inferior. When Christianity was introduced in Bali, for instance, missionaries identified Christian European culture with the Gospel and tried to impose it on the converts. Missionaries told the converts that their culture and religion were demonic and urged their destruction.  

This attitude produced a lack of sensitivity to, and appreciation of non-western cultures. The truth that God works in and through all cultures was overlooked. Disregard for the cultural values, outlook, and thought patterns of the new Christians led to the imposition – however unconsciously – of western theological and ecclesiastical traditions upon the churches and theological schools overseas.

A third factor arises from a misunderstanding of the nature and function of theology. The traditional concept of the nature and role of theology is exemplified by A. H. Strong's definition of theology as the,

ascertaining of the facts respecting God and the relation between God and the universe, and the exhibition of these facts in their rational unity, as connected parts of a formulated and organic system of truth.  

This view of theology is based on the assumption that revelation is the unveiling of timeless truths through passive inspired writers who produce an unchanging document. The task of theology, according to this view is "to build up these individual truths (propositions) into a coherent, homogeneous

7 ibid.,

system. The desired end in the theological activity is a "theologia perennis: the ever self-identical, unchanging articulation and application of immutable divine truth." Thus, theological systems and traditions may be transmitted from one culture to another without modification or reformulation.

This mistaken view of the nature and task of theology has been responsible for what Robin Boyd calls (with particular reference to India) the "Babylonian" or "Latin captivity" of the Church. Indeed this Babylonian captivity has been characteristic of the state of Asian theology and theological education up to the beginning of the second half of this

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10 ibid., p. 170.


By the middle of the second half of the century, a renewal of the Church was felt to be necessary. This prompted changes in many areas of the Church's life: worship, ministry, theological education etc. One significant change was the need for Asian churches to develop an indigenous Christian theology. During the 1960s, in India, for example, theologians and Church leaders came to recognize that for the church to be a "living" reality, "her theology must reckon with the context of the traditional and contemporary life and thought of India."\(^{14}\)

The acknowledgement by Asians of the need for an indigenous theology was expressed in the Consultation of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) held at Kandy, Sri Lanka in 1965. There, attention was directed to the creation of what the conference called a "living theology." That is, a theology that has to do with the very existence of Asian people as

\(^{13}\) The point has been made incessantly by C. S. Song. In an article entitled, "Theological Education - A Search for a New Break Through," \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 9, no. 4 (1968), he asserted that theological education in Asia has become so institutionalized under the institutionalized Church that it has become stagnant and irrelevant for the wider situation of Asia. The heavy dependence of theological education in Asia on the Church for financial support, for the contents, methods and for the nature and purpose of theological education has "on the whole led to a sort of Babylonian captivity under the Church," (p. 7). Again in "The New China and Salvation History - A Methodological Enquiry," \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), he writes, "Theology, for the masterminds of Western theological traditions, seldom gets the chance to break out of the western historical and cultural framework to which the Word of God in the Bible has been made captive." (pp. 55-56).

Christians and as Churches.

Such a theology must speak to the actual questions people in Asia are asking in the midst of their dilemmas; their hopes, aspirations and achievements; their doubts, despair and suffering. It must also speak in relation to the answers that are being given by Asian religions and philosophies, both in their classical forms and in new forms created by the impact on them of Western thought, secularism and science. In sum, a living theology is one that is "born out of the meeting of a living church and its world."  

Clearly what is suggested here is a conscious attempt on the part of Asian Christians to understand and express the Christian faith from an Asian perspective. No more are they content, as Charles Taber puts it, with "tagging along at the tail end of the long history of Western embroidery."  

Rather, they are feeling the urge to restate the Christian faith in answer to Asian questions with Asian methodologies and terminologies. According to Gerald H. Anderson, this new development constitutes "the great new fact of our time". That Christian theologians in the Third world are seeking to reconceptualize the God of biblical revelation within the


context of their different cultures is a sure sign of "the break from Teutonic captivity."\textsuperscript{17}

To help them in their quest, Asian theologians today are proposing what they call the "critical Asian principle" as a method for doing theology in their situations. They are not yet very clear about it, but as they struggle to discover its range and depth they see it operating at various methodological levels. The main thrust of what this principle implies may be seen in the words of Dr. Emerito P. Nacpil:

For one thing, it is a way of saying where our area of responsibility is, namely, the varieties and dynamics of Asian realities. We are committed to understand this context both sympathetically and critically. For another thing, it is a way of saying that we will approach and interpret the Gospel in relation to the needs and issues peculiar to the Asian situation. It functions therefore as a hermeneutical principle. Third, it is a way of saying that a theology worth its salt at this time in Asia must be capable not only of illuminating the Asian realities with the light of the Gospel, but also of helping to manage the changes now taking place along lines more consonant with the Gospel.\textsuperscript{18}

In the light of this statement, it is obvious that the kind of indigenous theology envisioned by Asian Christians emphasises the particularity of Asia. They are saying that the Christian response must be expressed in relation to the: (1) present realities of Asian existence, (2) needs and issues peculiar to the Asian situation and (3) the various changes taking place in present day Asia.

In the present moment, attempts at formulating an

\textsuperscript{17} Gerald H. Anderson, op. cit., p. 3.

indigenous living theology place much more emphasis on the 'context' of Asia; context being understood in terms of, the Christian community in which the individual Christian stands as well as the folk traditions, the classical culture, the impact of modern secular culture, and the socio-political environment with which the Christian community must be in constant dialogue.  

This development is subsequent to the introduction of the concept of 'contextualization' in connection with the renewal of theological education. It is no surprise therefore that the term contextualization has come to be descriptive of the process of indigenizing theology in Asia. It has become a key concept in relation to Asian attempts to relate their faith to the actual realities of life. And in this contextualizing approach, we are witnessing the emergence of what might be called, following R. H. S. Boyd, a "third perspective" in Christian theology, in contrast to that of the Latin and Greek theological traditions which emanated from the Graeco-Roman cultural matrix. Let us now consider some of the main trends of indigenization in Asia.

B. Early Indigenous Movements Among Indian Christians.

Early in the seventeenth century, the Jesuit missionary Robert de Nobili upon arrival in India (1605) immediately

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20 See Chapter 1. Further discussion found in Chapter 3.

21 Refer R. H. S. Boyd, op. cit.,
engaged himself in the task of indigenizing the Christian message. Realizing that Hindus regarded Christianity as a foreign import, he adopted the dress and style of a Brahmin sannyasi, set himself to learn Sanskrit and used his knowledge of Hindu scriptures to communicate the Christian faith in language and thought-forms which would be intelligible to those whom he hoped to reach.\textsuperscript{22}

Protestant missionaries arriving in the 18th century also made attempts to indigenize Christianity.\textsuperscript{23} However, unlike de Nobili's approach, their first priority was the translation of the Bible into Indian languages. Along with this went preaching and the proclamation of the Gospel as well as work for social reform in such matters as education, infanticide, "sati"\textsuperscript{24} and the improvement of the lot of women.

Following in the example of the Western missionaries, Indians themselves eventually came to assume responsibility for indigenizing Christianity. The need for an indigenous Church which was propelled considerably by the spirit of nationalism came to concrete form in a number of "indigenous

\textsuperscript{22} ibid., p. 4. See also, Kaj Baago, \textit{Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity}, Confessing the Faith in India Series, (Madras: CLS-CISRS, 1969), p. 29.

\textsuperscript{23} ibid., pp. 4-5. The first Protestant missionaries were the German Lutherans Ziegenbalg and Plutschau of the Danish Mission. They arrived in Madras in 1706. Nine decades later, the British Baptist cobbler William Carey came (1793) and began work on Danish soil in Serampore near Calcutta.

\textsuperscript{24} This is the Indian custom of the self-immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband.
movements" during the second half of the 19th century. These resulted in the formation of a number of "indigenous churches" the most famous among which were: 'The Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus' (Tinnevelly, 1858), 'The Christo Samaj' (Calcutta, 1887) and The 'National Church of Madras' (1886).

All of these emerged as separate entities; independent of the missionary churches with which their leadership had once been associated. What gave rise to these indigenous movements? A number of common characteristics were found which could indicate the reasons behind their formation.

First, each of these movements tended to take the form of opposition to missionaries. Underlying this opposition was an apparent discontent with the imperialistic character of the missionaries' Church, particularly the imposition upon the Indian Christians of what Kali Charan Banerjea called the missionaries' "adjective Christianity." That is, the external forms in which the essential and unchanging elements

25 For discussion of these movements refer, Kaj Baago, Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity, (Madras: CLS-CISRS, 1960), Chapter 1.

26 ibid., p. 1.

27 ibid., p. 6. K. C. Banerjea was co-founder of the Calcutta Christo Samaj. Baago reports him to have stressed the importance of distinguishing between "substantive" and "adjective" Christianity. Substantive Christianity consisted in the essential elements of the Christian faith as expressed in the Apostolic Creed. These beliefs should and could never be changed; they were the same all over the world. Adjective Christianity was all that had developed in the course of time with the purpose of protecting and conserving the basic truths, such as confessional statements and organizational forms. This adjective Christianity could change from place to place. The foreign missions should refrain from imposing their adjective Christianity on the Indian Church but only give it the fundamentals, leaving it to work out its own confession and organization.
of the Christian faith are expressed. An indication of the Indian opposition to the missionaries may be glimpsed from this report about the 'Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus' by a contemporary English missionary, Joseph Mullen. Baago quotes him as saying:

In their zeal for caste and Hindu nationality, they rejected everything which appeared to them to savour of a European origin. Hence they abandoned infant-baptism and an ordained ministry. Instead of wine they used the unfermented juice of grapes in an ordinance they regarded as the Lord's Supper and observed Saturday instead of Sunday as their sabbath.²⁸

Secondly, there was an apparent dissatisfaction among Indian Christians with regard to the exclusive missionary control of the Church as well as the theological and ecclesiastical differences which the missionaries accepted and maintained. These factors invoked among Indian Christians a need not only to be masters of their own church organization and administration, but also a desire to eliminate the denominational divisions which they considered an unwanted and dispensable Western import.

Finally, there was an inherent demand for a positive appraisal of Indian culture in connection with the life and worship of the Christian Church. Instead of the outright rejection of local culture (Hindu) as was characteristic of much missionary theology, what Indian Christians were calling for was the retention of or modification of their indigenous customs for use in Christian worship. A typical example of this feeling is expressed in the following statements by the

²⁸ ibid., p. 1.
founders of the Calcutta Christo Samaj:

In having become Christians, we have not ceased to be Hindus. We are Hindu Christians, as thoroughly Hindu as Christian. We have embraced Christianity, but we have not discarded our nationality. 29

What Indians are saying is that if Christianity should develop freely and naturally in India, it should be removed from the hot-house of European Church organization and planted in the genial soil of Indian modes of thought and feeling.

It is obvious that what these movements aimed for was the establishment of a truly authentic Indian Christian Church. A church freed of mission control and foreign structures in order that it might be able to forge its own distinctive character and create a sense of integrity. A church administered by local personnel, organized according to Indian ways and structured on Indian principles. One which can utilize local resources and cultural modes and forms for expressing the essential elements of the Christian faith. Such a church was envisaged to be truly indigenous.

However noble the aspirations of these Indian Christians were, their efforts were often met with the disapproval of the missionaries for reasons we shall not go into. Suffice it to say that partly because of lack of missionary support, these indigenous movements never really became widespread. 30 They existed only for a short period of time before eventually fading away. In other words, they failed to achieve what they set out to accomplish.


30 ibid., p. 7.
In spite of that however, these movements did play a very significant role as far as the process of indigenization in India went. For one thing, they represent the very first attempts to create united, indigenous churches. For another, the influence they exerted on the thinking of Indian Christians especially with respect to attitudes toward local culture and religion was not inconsiderable. Baago alludes to this when he says that "it is not accidental that the first Indian Christians who tried to formulate an indigenous Christian Theology came from Calcutta, Madras and Tinnevelly." The suggestion is that the attempts of later Christians to create an indigenous theology was more or less a consequence of or an inevitable outgrowth of the initial thinking that prompted these early movements.

M. M. Thomas confirms this view when he states that the "thought of an indigenous Indian Church", that is, a church which witnesses to Christ within the context of the Indian realities of life has been the motivating force behind the various developments (e.g. theological education, christian apologetics, church union discussions, theology of nationalism, etc) within the church since the turn of the century. And in that 'thought' of an indigenous Indian Church, he adds, "the idea of an indigenous theology was

31 ibid., p. 11. The first Indian Christians to take up the task of indigenizing Christian theology include people like Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813 - 1885) of Calcutta; Parani Andi of Madras; A. S. Appasamy Pillai of Tinnevelly (1848 - ?); Brahmabandhav Upadhyay of Calcutta (1861-1907) and Sadhu Sandra Singh (1889-1928).
C. Christianity And Asian Religions.

A major trend in Asian attempts to formulate an indigenous theology in the present century is centred on the question of the relationship between Christianity and Asian religions. With the resurgence of Asian faiths in the last century, vital questions became unavoidable. Is there a theological connection between Christianity and other religions? Could there be a positive relationship between them? Can it be maintained, as most early missionaries had thought, that Asian religions were nothing less than the work of the devil himself? How can the truth of the gospel be reconciled with the religious truths of Asian faiths? Such questions have engaged the minds of both Asian and Western thinkers even up to the present time.

1. Christianity and the Original Religion of the Vedas.

Krishna Mohun Banerjea, Parani Andi and Appasamy Pillai were among the earliest Asian Christians to wrestle with such questions. We have already met these names in connection with the Indian 'indigenous movements' described above. Influenced

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by the thought of Brahmo Samajists\textsuperscript{33} like Ramohan Roy (1774-1833), Kesavanchandra Sen (1838-1884), P. C. Mozoomdar (1840-1905) and the Arya Samaj\textsuperscript{34} leader, Dayananda Sarasvathi etc - both toward the necessity of indigenization and in the content of their theologies - Banerjea, Andi and Pillai propounded what Baago calls a "Vedic-Christian theology."\textsuperscript{35}

They tried to show how Christianity in various ways was the fulfilment of the Vedic religion of their forefathers. Banerjea in the 'Introduction' of his \textit{Arian Witness}, describes the purpose of the book as being an attempt "to show the striking parallels between the Old Testament (particularly Genesis) and the Vedas," thereby proving that Christianity was identical with, or if not, then certainly the logical conclusion of original Hinduism.\textsuperscript{36}

Similarly, Andi and Pillai drew numerous parallels between the Old Testament and the Vedas, finding in the Rig Veda especially, an "anticipation of Christianity" particularly in the "proclamation of one God" as well as clear

\textsuperscript{33} Brahmo Samaj was movement of Neo-Hinduism founded by Raja Rammohun Roy and others in 1830 for the purpose of worship, prayer and religious discussions. Worship included recitation from the Upanishads, a sermon and hymns. The Society was thus virtually a 'theistic church.' After Roy, the leadership of the group was carried by Keshub Chunder Sen and P. C. Mozoombar.

\textsuperscript{34} Arya Samaj was another movement among Neo-Hinduism. Unlike Brahmo Samaj, which strove for a renewal of Hindu culture and religion in positive response to Western Christianity and humanism, Arya Samaj sought a militant revival of Hinduism in its Vedic purity in defence against Christianity.

\textsuperscript{35} Kaj Baago, op. cit., p. 31.

\textsuperscript{36} ibid., pp. 13-14.
"predictions of Christ." In sum, all these men found in the Vedas the "original, theistic, pure religion of India from where India had fallen." This insight led them to claim that the Christian religion, with its belief in one creator God was really no different from the original religion of the Vedic sages.

Appasamy went considerably further than the other two in the task of indigenization by making deliberate use of Indian yoga technique in his meditation and prayer life. He also used the experience gained through yoga for the formulation of certain indigenous theological statements. For instance, in his book, The Use of Yoga in Prayer (1926), he states his belief that God speaks through the Bible and also "directly soul to soul." Those who are filled with an eager desire to see God and wait in prayer will see God. And Yoga, which according to some scholars means union, has been to Appasamy the type of prayer in which God has revealed Godself to him.

Appasamy considered his yoga visions as a second source of revelation besides the Bible. On the basis of visions and revelations of God he experienced through yoga, he tried to work out a new interpretation of the doctrines of Trinity and of the Logos. In his The Eternal Divine Son and The Divine Birth of the Eternal Son, God is seen basically as 'Light.'

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37 ibid., pp. 18-19.
38 ibid., p. 12.
Before creation, God was "as a mass of radiant, glorious light." Support for this theory was drawn not only from the Bible and Hindu scriptures but also from science where light and life were recognized to have an intimate connection. Drawing on the biblical creation account (Gen. 1: 2) and finding support in the Bhakti literature where creation is seen as an outcome of the co-operation of Siva and Sakti (power), he claimed that the Holy Ghost proceeded from God and together they created the world. But before creation, Christ came forth as the "image of God in the form of spiritual body." In that image, humanity was created.

The attempts of these early Indian theologians to formulate an indigenous 'Vedic-Christian theology' were largely fragmentary and often, according to Baago, could not hold water because of their susceptibility in many incidents to wild speculation. Nevertheless their significance lies in the fact that they indicate the change that had taken place in the Indian Christian attitude to Hinduism, in the light of their understanding of the gospel. Their attempts point to an awareness of the need to reflect theologically on the relation of Christianity to their religious heritage.

2. Christianity and Sankara's Advaita Vedanta.

Brahmabandhav Upadyay (1861-1907) was another Indian Christian who stood in the tradition of the early indigenous

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40 ibid., p. 23.

41 ibid., pp. 16-17; 23.
'Vedic-Christian' theologians. Like them, he, during the early part of his life, believed that the original pure faith of ancient India was, like Christianity, theistic. But during the course of time, this pure theism had been corrupted mainly by the doctrines of re-incarnation and transmigration and the 'Advaita' philosophy. Yet in the latter part of his life, he began to look to Sankara's advaita Vedanta as a possible foundation for an Indian Christian theology.

If Aristotelian philosophy had served as the basis of scholastic theology, Upadyay thought, then Indian philosophy could, by necessity, be used as a foundation for an indigenous Indian theology. He writes,

Our missionary experiences have shown us how unintelligible the Catholic doctrines appear to the Hindus when presented in the scholastic garb. The Hindu mind is extremely subtle and penetrative, but is opposed to the Graeco-Scholastic method of thinking. We must fall back on the Vedantic method, in formulating the Catholic religion to our countrymen. In fact the Vedantic philosophy must render the same service as the Greek philosophy in Europe.

Upadyay believed that the western forms of Christianity were neither the only possible ones nor were they final. The invincible integrity of the Universal Faith deposited in the

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42 Advaita Vedanta is considered the 'highest' of India's many philosophical systems. Associated with Sankara, Advaita philosophy teaches that Reality is non-dual, not-two, (dvaita means dual). Only Absolute Reality is real, all else is an illusion or 'maya.' And the realization of this truth is the goal of every advaitin. See, Robin Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church*, p. 25. Also, T. M. P. Mahadevan, "Contemporary Relevance of the Insights of Advaita," in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Series Two), ed., Margaret Chatterjee (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), Chap. 6.

apostolic Church remained the same and could not be changed. But the expression of that 'deposit' varied. Therefore any opposition to the use of an Indian thought-system, on whatever grounds, was unwarranted. "The assimilation of Vedantic philosophy should not be opposed because it contains certain errors. Were not Plato and Aristotle guilty of monumental errors?"

Thus using Vedantic categories and forms, Upadyay attempted a theological formulation of the Christian faith. Contrary to the prevailing impression already created by missionaries among Hindus that Christianity was the "destroyer of Hinduism", Upadyay tried to show that Christianity was rather, its "fulfilment." Using the Vedantic term 'Brahman,' he described the Christian God not merely as the First Cause but the Absolute Being. Unlike finite beings whose existence was contingent, God's being was an 'essential Being' which meant that God existed by necessity. But unlike the 'Brahman' about whom Hindus could say only 'neti-neti' (not this or that), the Christian God was not unknowable or unapproachable.

In his interpretation of the Christian doctrine of Trinity, Upadyay uses the Vedantic concept of 'Saccidananda' to demonstrate how Brahman can be known. Brahman as Being (Sat) itself is unrelated and therefore unknowable, and yet

44 Baago, ibid., p. 37. Also, R. H. S. Boyd, An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology, p. 68.

45 ibid., p. 35.

46 'Parabrahman' or 'nirguna Brahman' are other terms which mean the same thing, that is, Brahman or Absolute Being.
Brahman 'begets' or produces 'Thought,' 'Intelligence,' 'Logos' (Cit) whereby he relates himself to himself. This Logos or Cit is Christ and it is the Logos by which God is known. In other words, God is known through God himself. Out of the union of Sat (Being) and Cit (Consciousness) proceeds the Ananda (Spirit).

According to the advaita doctrine of 'Maya,' Brahman alone is real and that everything else - all creation - is maya or illusion. How then, is the Christian God related to the created world? To get around this problem, Upadyay reinterprets Sankara's doctrine of Maya. God or Brahman is Sat (Being), and all else is 'asat' (non-being). Asat, however, really means that which, unlike God, has no necessary being; their existence is 'contingent' on God's. Also, maya is not mere illusion, but is rather 'the fecund divine power' (sakti) which gives birth to multiplicity.

In this way, Upadyay is able to explain the Christian doctrine of 'creation ex nihilo' to Hindus. It means that "God by his divine power brings contingent being to light out of the nothingness of non-being." The world therefore has only a contingent existence, but by union with God in Christ we can penetrate to the 'really Real,' for only in the contemplation of God's essence, that is, Sat itself, is final bliss to be found.

47 Baago, ibid., p. 40.
For Sankara, the goal of humanity is to reach the true realization of Brahman. This realization is understood in terms of atman merging with Brahman in a union without distinction. For Upadyay, Christianity adds that by the blessing of God souls have been given eternal life, and also our souls may be granted divine life. The goal of humanity is thus not to merge with God in such a way that one's individuality is lost, but to know God and to be like him.

What is the end of man? To know God as He is; to behold Him, face to face; to be like him; to be united with him. St John says that we shall be like Him as He is ... Jesus Christ Himself desires us to be one in and with God.49

This knowledge of God which Upadyay takes to be more than intellectual understanding, has to be revealed to humanity. And for this reason, the Logos became incarnate.

In his Christology, Christ the Logos is the revelation of God. As such, he is firstly "the universal Teacher" whose teaching is for "all nations, all ages, for all climes." Jesus Christ claims to embrace all without reserve and bring them to the universal light which enlightens every man. Secondly, Christ reveals the inner life of God. He says,

Jesus Christ claims to have laid open the mystery of Divine Life that man may apprehend it in faith and work by its light to the final goal of beholding God as He is, living in communion of self-relation within Himself.50

Thirdly, Christ is God who suffers for our salvation. Thus by this revelation of God in Christ, humanity receives not only


50 The Twentieth Century, (1901), p. 116, cited by Baago, ibid., p. 44.
illumination, but also grace. By God's grace alone human beings are capable of reaching illumination, seeing God as God is and being one with him. In Christ therefore, Upadyay claims that all religions must find their fulfilment. In him alone, the possibility of reconciliation between Christianity and Hinduism in particular is found.

Upadyay's theology was rather incomplete; and although he did not produce a Summa Theologica as many would have hoped to see, he did succeed in pioneering an Indian Christian theology. Boyd rightly likens him to Bonhoeffer in that he began new lines of thought and suggested new possibilities of interpreting the Christian Gospel in an Indian setting. Similar attempts have been made by others with regard to Confucianism, Buddhism, Shamanism and other Asian religions.

3. Christianity as the 'Fulfilment' of Hinduism.

Around the turn of the century, the line of thought taken by Upadyay was carried forward in the form of an Indian

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liberal theology. This time the proponents were not Indian Christians who had their background in Indian religious and philosophical traditions. Rather they were mainly missionaries who were to a large extent inspired by theological developments in the West. A characteristic feature of this liberal theology was an optimistic belief in progress based on the idea of evolution, a feature which came out especially in the American offshoot of the movement, the Social Gospel.

The main contribution of the Liberals to an indigenous theology was found in what came to be known as the 'Fulfilment Theory.' In one way or another, the liberals tried to present Christ as the fulfilment of Hinduism, or, rather, of the religious aspirations found in Hinduism. The foundation of this fulfilment theology was laid by T. E. Slater in his book *The Higher Hinduism in Relation to Christianity* and found its culmination in Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism*, (1914).

Characteristically, Christianity was viewed as the highest of all religions, "the goal of the whole religious evolution." Since the coming of Christ, all that is good and true in other religions have been taken up in Christianity which is their fulfilment. Farquhar emphasized the importance of the historical Jesus and the ethical contents of his

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53 Generally, liberal theology was an attempt to present the Christian faith as meaningful and acceptable in a scientific age. It rejected the metaphysical aspects of the Christian faith and stressed the historical and ethical. Rather than the 'Christ of faith' it stressed the ethical teachings and life of the historical Jesus as the ideal for people's moral striving. Hence, the 'Kingdom of God' was understood, not as a heavenly, other-worldly abode, but as the perfect society or the new humanity gradually being built up on earth.
message, not Christianity as it was expressed in any particular form. "When we say that Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism," he explains,

we do not mean Christianity as it is lived in any nation, nor Christianity as it is defined and elaborated in detail in the creed, preaching, liturgy, and discipline of any single Church, but Christianity as it springs living and creative from Christ Himself.  

So a clear distinction was made between Christ and Christianity. Christ and not the Church, was the 'crown' or the fulfilment of Hinduism. As to how this would come about, Farquhar believes that,

the Kingdom of God having come to Hinduism must pass away, that it is the duty of Hindu to give up Hinduism so that Christianity may take its place, and may thereby fulfil all that is in it of good.

In other words, Farquhar believed that this fulfilment would happen through a "replacement" of Hinduism by Christianity.

Another line of thought was developed by William Miller and Bernard Lucas. Contrary to the more conservative position of Farquhar, Miller and Lucas expected the fulfilment to take place through a "development" of all higher religions, Christianity included, into a world religion with Christ as the centre. This was a more sympathetic view of Hinduism. Whilst they maintained the distinction between Christ and Christianity, they disagreed with the Farquharian position because it applied the concept of evolution to the non-Christian religions only, presuming that Christianity had


reached the highest plane and that other religions could reach the same only by surrendering to it.

Miller and Lucas argued that Christianity had not reached full development, believing that she could do so only through contributions from other religions. Together with all other religions Christianity was developing and gradually moving forward towards a future world faith centred on Christ. In his book, Our Task in India, (London: Macmillan, 1914) Lucas spoke of the work of Christ and his Spirit transforming Hinduism, and of evangelism as working to further it rather than to win converts to a churchly Christianity.56

4. Theology of Dialogue.

With the appearance of Kraemer's The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (1938) with its "biblical realism" and Barthian outlook on non-Christian religions, the idea of a common religious basis for interreligious fellowship came to an end.57 For the next two decades, a new tendency to absolutize the Christian religion over against other religions held the field.58 However, a new approach which emphasized the idea of 'dialogue' between Christianity and Asian faiths came to dominate the theological climate of the late 1950s.


58 R. H. S. Boyd, India and the Latin Captivity of the Church, p. 6.
What this new approach entailed is described by Robyn Boyd as follows:

Dialogue demands the abandonment of the attitude of hostility and its replacement by friendship and concern; it requires an informed knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the other faith, and the open 'sharing' of religious experience in an attempt to plumb the depths of each other's spirituality; only in such a context ought the Christian to witness to Christ and the place that Christ holds in his own life.59

The emphasis is put on a mutual relationship between religions based on an informed understanding of each other's beliefs. Such mutuality opens the way for a sharing of experience and religious insights thus enabling Christians to witness to Christ.

Early traits of this approach appeared in the writings of the Indian trio - P. Chenchiah (1886-1959), V. Chakkarai and A. J. Appasamy - known as the 'Rethinking Group' after their well-known publication, Rethinking Christianity in India (1938). Like many of their predecessors, each of these men wished to affirm the rich spiritual heritage of India, arguing that "loyalty to Christ does not involve the surrender of a reverential attitude towards the Hindu heritage."60 They believed that the understanding of the Christian faith may gain new depth and richness from its contact with Hindu culture just as it did in the West from contact with Greece. So an openness toward Hinduism on the part of Christians ought to be seen as something of mutual benefit rather than

59 ibid., p. 7.

60 Rethinking Christianity in India, (1939), p. 49.
something to be feared.\textsuperscript{61}

This idea of complete openness in the meeting between people of different traditions was stressed and popularized by Paul D. Devanandan in the late 1960s through his writings, especially his posthumous publication, \textit{Preparation for Dialogue} (1964).\textsuperscript{62} Concerned mainly with contemporary developments in Hinduism and Indian secular society, Devanandan used the principle of dialogue to interpret the Christian task of evangelism as well as the whole relationship between Christianity and Hinduism.

For Devanandan, dialogue provides a way by which Christians can participate and share in the rich and varied life of contemporary India. At the same time, it offers a meaningful way of presenting the Christian Gospel of the new humanity in Christ to contemporary Hindus.\textsuperscript{63} Dialogue is therefore a 'sharing of experience', both of Christian and Hindu; a sharing in which it may prove possible together to arrive at some firm theological basis which will undergird that movement towards God's new creation which he believes to be at work in the Church and also outside it.\textsuperscript{64}

Two things are involved in dialogue. The first is an effort to 'understand' his Hindu contemporaries, through a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} R. H. S. Boyd, \textit{Introduction to Indian Christian Theology}, p. 163.
\item \textsuperscript{62} For an examination of Devananda's thought on 'dialogue,' see, R. H. S. Boyd, \textit{An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology}, Chapter 10.
\item \textsuperscript{63} ibid., p. 187.
\item \textsuperscript{64} ibid., p. 202.
\end{itemize}
"historical and analytical study" of the various modern movements in order to show how in many fields Hindu practice has advanced beyond traditional orthodox theory. The second thing is a "frank interchange in conversation" in which a sharing takes place between Christian and Hindu; a sharing of the Christian insights in these different fields and the whole meaning of the "new creation" that is ours 'in Christ,' as well as the Hindu understanding of the high values of their culture.\(^{65}\)

In summary, dialogue can be said to be really a new attitude of openness, friendliness and receptivity to the people of other religions whom one meets. It means, according to Robin Boyd,

meeting someone of a different tradition in an atmosphere of complete openness and friendship, sharing with him your own experience, seeking to share his experience, and leaving the next step to God.\(^{66}\)

Among Asian Christians today, the concern for dialogue has become a significant perspective for theological reflection. This has followed on from the realization by the Asian community of the need for a deeper understanding of the Christian relationship to other faiths, in view of numerous pressing factors. For example, there is growing pluralism of Asian societies; the awareness of a 'universal human

\(^{65}\) ibid.,

consciousness' seeking for peace and happiness; and the growing knowledge and experience of Christians regarding other faiths and ideologies. These factors have led the Christian Conference of Asia to state:

The situation of the 1970s in relation to inter-faith and inter-human dialogue confronts us Christians with many fundamental questions which go to the very roots of our response to God in Christ and how we are to understand, biblically, God's purpose of love for the world and the mission of the church.67

There is in this statement an obvious recognition by the Asian churches of the necessity of re-thinking the Christian position - which has been largely negative - regarding inter-faith relations. There is an urgent need for a theology of dialogue.

This necessity is sounded in the writings of many Asian theologians.68 Rev. S. Ariarajah of Sri Lanka suggests that a theology of dialogue must have a new understanding of religion and theology so that the doors might be left "open for a more ecumenical and universal understanding of the significance of the Gospel."69 Implicit in such a 'universal understanding of the Gospel' is the need for a "truer

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understanding of the nature of scripture and its authority"\textsuperscript{70} as well as the need to take the "human community as the locus of God's activity."\textsuperscript{71}

In summing up his vision of this kind of theology, Ariarajah says,

Theology of dialogue does not surrender the particularity of the Christian faith, of Jesus Christ and of the community that confesses him and is committed to him. Such commitment, however, must lead us to a more open, generous and inclusive understanding of God and His ways. It must not separate us from our fellow human being but must place us in the midst of his struggles and hopes so that we can together seek the community that God intends for all his people.\textsuperscript{72}

In other words, dialogue between Christians and members of other faiths does not mean meeting each other half way in order to reach some sort of agreement. It does not mean compromising one's faith for the sake of accommodating the other's. Rather, what is envisaged is a freedom for and total openness toward the other which allows for a sharing of spiritual experiences while at the same time recognizing the particularity of the other's beliefs. And in that sharing and openness, it is hoped that both Christians and other faith believers may be enriched and deepened in their faith commitments, through the power of the 'Word' at work within them.

\textsuperscript{70} ibid., p. 73.

\textsuperscript{71} ibid., p. 75.

\textsuperscript{72} ibid., p. 76.
D. Suffering: A Point of Entry for Indigenizing Theology.

Another important trend in the indigenization of theology in Asia involves the attempt of Christians to grapple with the meaning of the Christian gospel centred on the love of God in Christ in the context of Asian life characterized by suffering and overwhelming poverty. How does the Christian Church relate to these realities of Asian existence? How is the redemptive love of God to be meaningfully expressed and proclaimed amidst such a situation? Where does the Church stand in relation to the problems of impoverishment and dehumanization faced by the Asian masses?

The problem was addressed at several meetings of the Christian Conference of Asia. At its first Faith and Order Consultation in Hong Kong, in 1966, it singled out four "points of entry" at which the proclamation of the gospel may commend itself to Asian people today. Together with the Asian experience of Nature, Society and Religion, Suffering was proposed.73

The choice of 'suffering' as a potential point of entry for the gospel is in part, due to recognition of the fact that in many Buddhist lands, the ancient religious answers to the problem of human suffering are still convincing to millions


Asian concern about this problem is again expressed in the Sixth Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia held in Penang, Malaysia, in 1977. Under the theme of "Jesus Christ in Asian Suffering and Hope," attention was focused upon concrete forms of Asian suffering today such as those resulting from poverty due to exploitation or oppression by the powerful. Although such suffering was not unique to Asia, the conference recognized that it was more massive in Asia since "more than three-quarters of the world's poor" live there.\footnote{A. A. Yewangoe, \textit{Theologia Crucis in Asia}, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), p. 10. Suffering has been affirmed by many to constitute the reality of Asian existence. See, Gunnar Myrdal, \textit{Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations}, (N.Y.: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1968); Fernando Nimelka, "The Reality of Asian Suffering," \textit{Testimony Amid Asian Suffering}, (Singapore, 1979); T. M. Philip, "An Indian Comment," in \textit{Asian Theological Reflections on Suffering and Hope}, ed., Yap Kim Hao (Singapore, 1979); A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in \textit{Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity}, ed., Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980), p. 75; CCA, "Message to the Asian Communities: Final Statement of the Kandy Conference," \textit{Dialogue} (new series), Vol. 7 (Sept-Dec. 1980), p. 119.}

There was then an expressed desire to come to grips with the problem. The general secretary's words, quoted by Elwood, gives expression to the feeling of the conference.

\footnote{ibid., p. 3.}
The phrase 'suffering and hope' is not meant to convey two unrelated categories; it should be seen as suffering-in-hope or hope-in-suffering. For those who suffer there is hope and in the suffering situation there is hope... as we all identify ourselves with these struggles we participate in the creative process of forging a new future for our peoples and societies. This calls for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and a wider involvement in the life of our people. Together with Christ we labour to build a more humane community where those who suffer can hope and where hope emerges from the suffering situations in Asia.77

Taking to heart the conference’s call for a "deeper understanding of the Christian faith," a number of Asian Christians have sought to reflect theologically on the faith from the perspective of suffering.

Kim Chung-Choon of Korea emphasizes that God is a co-sufferer of the people (minjung). God in Christ, seen as the suffering Servant (Isaiah 53: 3) identifies with all who suffer in human history through injustice and violence.78 That God is present in human troubles and miseries is also emphasized by M. M. Thomas, who sees God in the face of Christ Who wept.79 The Indonesian poet, Rendra, sees God as the Companion of the sufferers, the despised, and the sinners.80

Vengal Chakkarai sees the greatness of God in the fact that God can love and suffer. "The greater the man, the greater his love and suffering, and if our God be infinite,


79 A. A. Yewangoe, op. cit., p. 287.

80 ibid., pp. 267-270.
infinite indeed must be His love and His suffering."\(^{81}\) The belief of the Christian bhakta (devotee) is precisely on the Cross as the embodiment of the suffering of God.\(^ {82}\) On the cross, Chakkarai says, God suffers - not merely a representation of God as some believe - because the Jesus who suffered on the Cross was none other than the Avatar of God. "To us Jesus is the very image of God, and God Himself."\(^ {83}\)

Of all those who have attempted to wrestle theologically with the reality of suffering, the name of Kazo Kitamori stands out pre-eminently because "he treats the problem most deeply and systematically."\(^ {84}\) Not only did Kitamori seek to interpret the gospel in terms of the suffering of God, but he also attempted to indigenize the gospel by using Japanese ideas to express his theological understanding of the Christian message. Let us turn to him now.

1. Theology of the Pain of God.

Affected by the experience of WW2 when Japan was paralysed and suffering extreme pain, and especially touched by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945), Kazo Kitamori sought to indigenize the message of the Gospel to that living situation of Japan. In his book, *Theology of the Pain of God*,


\(^{82}\) ibid., pp. 174-5.


\(^{84}\) A. A. Yewangoe, op. cit., p. 286.
first published in 1946, he expresses the conviction that the "heart of the Gospel" was revealed to him as the "pain of God."\textsuperscript{85}

God's pain is neither simply a pain of sympathy nor empathy with the miseries of humankind. It is rather, says Kitamori, "a pain in God's very being as God." Pain belongs to and is constitutive of the Godhead. It is the essence of God.\textsuperscript{86} And in this pain, Kitamori places the source of God's love. The whole of the gospel for Kitamori is therefore summed up in the phrase, "love rooted in the pain of God."

My prayer night and day is that the gospel of love rooted in the pain of God may become real to all men. All human emptiness will be filled if this gospel is known to every creature, since the answer to every human problem lies in the gospel. Therefore I pray, 'May thou, O lord, make known to all men thy love rooted in the pain of God.' The greatest joy and thanksgiving comes from the knowledge that this prayer is being granted and that step by step this gospel is becoming real to mankind.\textsuperscript{87}

What does this 'love rooted in the pain of God' mean?

Kitamori describes three orders of love in God. The first order is simply 'the love of God' which "pours immediately on its object without any hindrance."\textsuperscript{88} Both Christ and humanity were originally objects of this "smooth, flowing, and intense" love. Since the Fall however, only Christ now remains the


\textsuperscript{86} ibid., pp. 44-49.

\textsuperscript{87} ibid., p. 150.

\textsuperscript{88} ibid., p. 17.
object. But God has not given up fallen humanity altogether. In spite of human waywardness, and God's will to punish fallen humanity, God "enfolded and embraced them ...". Here, love of the first order becomes the 'pain of God.' This pain is an outcome of the struggle between "God in his will of wrath and God in his will of love." It is the result of 'God fighting with God' - to use Luther's words. The pain of God reflects God's will to love the object of God's wrath.

The third order of love is the love rooted in pain. Embracing fallen humanity, the second love transcends human obedience and becomes the 'love rooted in the pain of God'. This love is no longer 'immediate flowing love' of the first order, but the love mediated by the pain of God. The initial flowing love is recovered now on the mediated basis. So the third order of love is not free from pain. It constantly carries pain within itself. For Kitamori, all three orders of love are seen inclusively in the one order - the "pain of God."

Kitamori's theology is very much influenced by Luther's theological formulation that at Golgotha 'God is fighting with God.' This conflict between the God's wrath and God's love has supplied the fundamental theological framework to the theology

89 ibid., p. 118.
90 ibid., p. 119.
91 ibid., p. 45.
92 ibid., p. 21.
93 ibid., p. 122.
of the pain of God. Now to try and express this idea of God fighting with God in a Japanese cultural milieu, Kitamori uses two Japanese terms, 'tsutsumu' and 'tsurasa.'

The verb 'tsutsumu', according to Koyama, "carries a certain significant place of honour" in pantheistic Japanese culture, where people enjoy and appreciate the moral surrounding as a hazy and charmingly simple totality. It means natural or non-argumentative desire; to embrace. 'Tsurasa' is the basic principle in Japanese tragedy. It is realized when one suffers and dies, or makes a beloved son suffer and die, for the sake of loving and making others live. Now by fusing these two terms and infusing them with christian meaning, Kitamori is able to express the meaning of the gospel in a cultural form.

According to Kitamori, God at the cross becomes a God of tsurasa, because God allows Jesus to suffer and die for the sake of loving and making the fallen humanity live. This tsurai God suffers painful conflict within Godself because of humanity whom God loves and from whom this conflict comes. In deciding to tsutsumu (to embrace, to enfold) those who deserve to be punished, God in Christ subjected Godself to the painful experience of dying on the Cross. In this divine act, tsurasa is realized.

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2. Theology of the Cross.

Kitamori’s theology of the pain of God is a theology of the Cross. The cross is an act not external to God, but an act within Godself. The cross, therefore, reveals the essence of God (pain) in its fullness. This means that the pain of God can only be known through the historical Jesus, who was born, lived, suffered, and died on the Cross. The cross of Jesus is understood as the realization of the pain of God in history. The suffering and death Jesus underwent are taken as a revelation of the suffering God in the midst of historical realities.

The pain and suffering of human beings, therefore, are to be seen as the representation, the reflection, the expression, or the actualization of God’s pain. In other words, God’s transcendent pain becomes immanent, incarnate in this world in human pain and suffering. Hence, social evil and human suffering are not so much a product of God’s wrath, not a punishment from God for sin, but rather a by-product, as it were, of God’s pain.

In this sense, Kitamori sees the suffering of humanity as beneficial. This benefit lies in the fact that God uses our suffering as “testimony to His own pain.” Awareness that our pain is being used in the service of God as testimony to
God’s pain will transform our suffering, and make it meaningful.\textsuperscript{99} That is, our suffering will be healed by serving God through our pain.

Kitamori’s thinking with respect to the symbolic nature of human pain leads him to the notion of "the mysticism of pain" summed up in the statement "I am dissolved in the pain of God and become one with Him in pain."\textsuperscript{100} This mystical union of pain is not to be understood in the ordinary Buddhist way, namely, union with Brahman. Rather it is to be understood in terms of unity with the God who suffers. For Kitamori, this unity with the suffering God leads to happiness, healing and renewal; in short, salvation.\textsuperscript{101}

The theological principle Kitamori uses in his formulation of the pain of God is the analogy of suffering (analogia dolores).\textsuperscript{102} Kitamori believes this is the only analogy which can solve the problem of human disobedience.

In the pain of God is his power which completely conquers the disobedience so deeply embedded in all human activities. In the analogy of pain, human pain serves the pain of God, who completely conquers our wilfulness, illusions, and disobedience. God accepts our service by resolving our disobedience. Thus man’s pain serves the pain of God by receiving such status that it can never fall into disobedience.\textsuperscript{103}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{99} ibid., p. 52ff.
\item \textsuperscript{100} ibid., p. 71.
\item \textsuperscript{101} ibid., p. 72.
\item \textsuperscript{102} ibid., p. 56.
\item \textsuperscript{103} ibid., p. 56.
\end{itemize}
3. Some Comments.

Kitamori's usage of the analogy of suffering in the formulation of his 'theology of pain' - given the context of his time and the religiosity of his people - is certainly very impressive and creative. However, a number of critical problems arise from his thesis of pain as the essence of God. For example, can the heart of the gospel be reduced to the pain of God? Is not the essence of God more than pain? Is not the Cross more than vicarious suffering?

While Kitamori's theology may strike a sympathetic chord in Asian spirituality, especially in the Buddhist tradition, it elevates pain to an ontological level so that pain reigns eternally supreme. His repeated reference to "love rooted in the pain of God" does therefore give little room for rooting pain in God's love, which according to Song is more true of the God revealed in Jesus.¹⁰⁴

A second difficulty in Kitamori's theological scheme is that he has virtually no reference to the resurrection. It can be argued therefore that Kitamori's theology cannot accommodate the hope of resurrection. Another problem is the logical conclusion of Kitamori's position regarding human suffering as the symbol of God's pain. If this is so, then, in order to remain a symbol of God's pain, human beings must

remain in suffering. Such a view, observes Yawengoe, "gives undoubted consolation and perseverance to the sufferers" and therefore cannot help to bring any change to the problem of acute suffering in Asia.  

Furthermore, Kitamori's view contains a strong possibility of being misused by the oppressors to continue oppression by creating a sense of patience and resignation among the oppressed. And in that respect, it would legitimate the old accusation that religion (in this case Christianity) is the opium of the masses. It is in this same context also that Song asks the question, "Does this mean that the Cross is a drama of God's own trial and we humans only its spectators?" One of Song's scathing critical remarks about Kitamori is that there is "too much theology and too little salvation for poor sinners."  

In spite of the criticisms that can be levelled at Kitamori, there is no doubt that the contribution he has made to Asian indigenous theology has been tremendous. Being the earliest attempt in Japan to reinterpret Christian theology in terms of Japanese religious experience, he serves as model for many Asian theologians in the effort to formulate a theology that takes seriously the Asian situation. His usage of the analogy of suffering in the formulation of his own theology and his emphasis on the Cross has encouraged and propelled a sort of Asian theological tradition which puts

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emphasis on suffering and the Cross as a principle for theological reflection.¹⁰⁷

E. Theology By The People.

The above title describes another way by which Asians, in recent years, have sought an indigenous expression of theological thought. This type of theology focuses attention on, firstly, the theological obligation of whole communities or 'peoples' to reflect on the Christian faith within the context of their own histories. Secondly, it focuses on questions of human concern and active commitment to justice and peace.¹⁰⁸ What is of central importance in this type of theology is the people's concrete experiences of history in their own situations. 'People movements' are thus considered to be important sources for doing theology.¹⁰⁹


¹⁰⁹ The realization by the Asian Christians of the necessity of theological expression to speak 'out of' the depths of their own histories and cultures - in all their concrete diversity - has led to concerted efforts for theological reconstruction. For example, a series of theological seminar-workshops carried out under the auspices of the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST) since 1983 has sought to formulate an Asian response to the Christian Gospel by drawing on a number of Asian resources such as Asian religions, folk literature, symbols and images,
Theologies such as African, Black, Feminist etc., are examples of people theologies. All embody insights drawn from two sources. The first is the Ecumenical Movement and its view of church as the people of God, each segment of which is important for the "business of the church." That is, the ecumenical vision of the need of the ordinary people to be at the heart of the church's search for a meaningful and relevant self-understanding and role in society and the world.¹¹⁰

The second is the idea of 'Comunidades eclesiales de base' associated with the Latin American Liberation Movement. That is, the phenomenon of 'basic Christian communities' of ordinary men and women who seek to live out their christian convictions in such communities, often because of dissatisfaction or frustration with the established churches.¹¹¹ Presupposed in this theological approach is a recognition of the need to interpret the Biblical message from the point of view of the people. Masao Takenaka calls it "People-o-logy."¹¹²


¹¹¹ ibid., p. 3.

1. Minjung Theology.

The best example of this kind is the Korean "Minjung theology" which emerged in the 1970s and first propounded by representatives like Ahn Byung-mu and Suh Nam-dong. In reflecting upon the christian faith, Korean theologians adopt the perspective of the people (minjung) as their starting point. People are the 'subjects of history.' They seek to involve the whole minjung in the process of theological reflection by making their everyday experiences, both personal and collective, the raw materials of the theological enterprise. Such a method constitutes a radical break from the traditional or western way of doing theology. In that respect, minjung theology is a counter-theology.

What is the meaning of 'minjung'? According to Korean theologians, the word 'people' does not do justice to the wealth of meaning the word minjung embodies. Kim Yong-bock points out that minjung is not a concept or object which can be easily explained or defined. It signifies a living reality which is dynamic. Minjung defines its own existence and generates new acts and drama in history. Being a "living

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entity" with an ever-unfolding drama and story - a holistic, dynamic and changing reality - minjung escapes any simple categorization. 116 Minjung, says Ahn Byung-mu, "like Jesus, is indefinable." 117 The word 'people' really can only serve as an approximate definition of minjung.

Contrary to the 'proletariat' of Marxist terminology, minjung is much more inclusive because minjung, understood within the context of Korean culture and history, denotes all the common people who have been regarded as the subjects of Korean history. 118 Those who are, according to the working definition of Moon Hee-suk Cyris, "oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated socially, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters." 119

116 ibid., p. 185.

117 Ahn Byung-mu, one of the foremost minjung theologians, quoted by Jung Young Lee, "Minjung Theology: A Critical Introduction," in An Emerging Theology in World perspective, ed., Jung Young-Lee (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1988), p. 3. (Further citing of this book will appear as An Emerging Theology.)

118 Kim Yong-bock has clarified the difference between the 'proletariat' in Marxist class analysis and the minjung. The proletariat is defined socio-economically, while the minjung is known politically. While the proletariat is 'confined' to socio-economic (materialistic) determination, so that it is bound to historical possibilities and the internal logic of history, the minjung, as historical subject transcends the socio-economic determination of history and unfolds its stories beyond mere historical possibilities to historical novelty - a new drama beyond the present history to a new and transformed history. See "Messiah and Minjung," in Minjung Theology, pp. 184-185.

119 Quoted by Jung Young Lee, "Minjung Theology: A Critical Introduction," An Emerging Theology, p. 5. James Cone has pointed out that while no agreement has been reached on a precise definition of minjung, most Korean theologians would agree that this definition is a 'useful' one. See 'Preface,' Minjung Theology.
Considered the custodians of the indigenous cultural and historical heritage of the Korean people, the alienation and oppression of the minjung, is then, none other than the alienation and oppression of the Korean people.\(^\text{120}\)


Minjung theology grew out of the people’s experiences of imprisonment, torture, underground movements, dehumanization in factories and farms and so on. It represents the political hermeneutics of the gospel in terms of Korean reality. David Kwang-sun Suh writes,

It is our effort to provide a framework of the political theology which takes into consideration the socio-economic and political history of Korea and the socio-political biography of the Christian koinonia in Korea.\(^\text{121}\)

Korean theologians try to reinterpret the Christian faith in light of the experiences of exploitation, alienation and oppression suffered by the majority (minjung) at the hands of the ruling elite. Minjung theology thus takes its departure point from the experiences of the people.

Stories of the minjung, by virtue of their being the "embodiment of people’s experiences,"\(^\text{122}\) are of great theological significance to minjung theologians. Deeply rooted in the history of oppression and exploitation of the

\(^{120}\) Jung Young Lee, ibid., 4.


\(^{122}\) David Kwang-sun Suh, "A Theology by Minjung," in *Theology by the People*, p. 69.
Korean minjung, these stories are to be regarded as the "socio-political biographies" of the people. 123

Stories form the bases and foundations of theological reflections. In the stories of Jesus minjung theologians find the story of the minjung. Thus the history of Jesus, his death and resurrection are interpreted as none other than the history of the minjung. In this sense, minjung theology is a "story theology." 124


One of the distinctive characteristics of the minjung experience is "han". This is a particular form of suffering defined by Moon Hee-suk Cyris as "the anger and resentment of the minjung which has been turned inward and intensified as they become the objects of injustice upon injustice." 125 Suh Nam-dong illustrates the meaning of han through stories. One such story involves Ms Kim, a skilled employee of Y. H. Trading Company.

Ms Kim joined the Y. H. Trade Union, a branch of the National Textile Trade Union, to combat the inhumane treatment and injustice to the employees. On August 9, 1979, 200 union members, including Ms. Kim, went to the New Democratic party building to ask the government to work out a fair solution to the imprisonment of their union leader and the announced

123 Kim Yong-bock, op. cit., p. 184.
124 David Kwang-sun Suh, ibid., p. 75.
125 Quoted by Jung Young Lee, op. cit., p. 8.
closing of their factory. On August 11, 1979 policemen intervened and dispersed the union members. During the police action Ms. Kim was killed. She was only 21 years old and a member of the executive committee of the union. According to a letter she left to her mother and younger brother, she had, during her eight years at the factory, experienced innumerable nose-bleeds from exhaustion, worked three months without being paid, and struggled with near-starvation, inadequate clothing, and worked without heat in winter. Yet she believed in the power of the labour movement. Her death embodied the han of eight million Korean workers.\footnote{126}{Suh Nam-dong, "Towards a Theology of Han," \textit{Minjung Theology}, p. 56.}

Han is an outgrowth of innocent suffering. It is, according to Suh Nam-dong, the 'underlying feeling' of Korean people. It is characterized on the one hand, by "defeat, resignation, and nothingness," and on the other, by a "tenacity of will for life which comes to weaker beings."\footnote{127}{ibid., p. 58.} Collectively, the Korean people are the people of han, for they are the victims of foreign invasions and controls. In order for the minjung to find liberation, han has to be resolved. And the only way this can be done is by restoring justice, that is, by reclaiming the rights of the minjung as subjects of history. Without justice the wounds of han cannot be healed.

Now to do this minjung theologians use another indigenous concept 'dan'. Dan means 'cutting off' the chain of han that
creates vicious circles of violence and repression. According to Kim Chi Ha, dan has two dimensions: self-denial at a personal level, and a curtailing of the vicious circle of revenge at a social level. At the personal level self-denial or self-sacrifice can cut off han. On social and collective levels, however, dan can work toward the transformation of the secular world. Dan can sublimate the entire human society to the higher level of existence. Then society becomes just and han disappears from the world.

Kim Chi Ha makes use of the Chondokyo's (Heavenly Way) central idea of "Innaech'on" or "humanity is heaven" to interpret the social and individual revolution. In this kind of revolution, "the bottom is heaven so that turning the bottom up is to realize the justice of heaven." The revolutionary process takes place in four stages:

1. Worshipping the divine embodiment (Shin-ch'onju),
2. Nurturing the divine embodiment (Yang-ch'onju),
3. Practising the divine embodiment (Haeng-ch'onju), and
4. Transcending the divine embodiment (Sang-ch'onju).

The idea of dan is dramatically illustrated in Kim Chi Ha's story of Chang Il-dam, the preacher of liberation and of han, who was eventually arrested and finally executed by the ruling group. His head was chopped off, but strange things happened to him and to his betrayer. Chang's head appeared on the betrayer's body, and the betrayer's head appeared on Chang's body. This symbolizes the dialectic between the unification of 'han' and 'dan.' The bonding of Chang's head (= justice and truth) to the betrayer's body (= injustice and falsehood) expresses the fact that the cutting off of han (that is, dan) is revenge but at the same time also the salvation of vicious and unjust people. This story is told by Suh Nam-dong, ibid., p. 66ff.

ibid., p. 66.

ibid., pp. 66-7.
The first stage is to realize God in our heart. This realization motivates us to worship God. The second stage is to allow the divine consciousness to grow in us. The third stage is to practise what we believe in God. This stage marks our struggle to overcome the injustice of the world through the power of God. The final stage is to overcome the injustice through transforming the world. In this stage resurrection takes place from death and the coming of the Kingdom of God is realized on earth. Dan, then, works in these four stages to resolve han. This is the soteriology of minjung theology.

4. Some Key Themes in Minjung Theology.

Unlike traditional western theology which is based on the kerygma of the early church, the "Jesus-event" is of central importance to Minjung theology. This 'Jesus-event' is seen to be presently taking place in Korea through the presence of the living Christ. A project of Minjung theology thus becomes the correlation of the Jesus-event in Judea 2000 years ago with the Jesus-event in Korea yesterday and today. What is the Jesus-event? It is the event of suffering, death and resurrection through which the "ochlos" of Mark's gospel, which is close to the meaning of minjung, have been liberated. The Jesus-event means the liberating event. Whenever there is a liberating event, there is the presence of the living Christ.

131 Jung Young Lee, op. cit., p. 11.
Minjung theology therefore attempts to identify the various past events of minjung struggle for liberation as the manifestations of the Jesus-event. Such identification is deemed possible by the presupposition that the Jesus-event is the "archetype of all other liberation events." This archetype of liberation struggle is manifested in Korea through the presence of the living Christ, embodied in the movement and activities of the Holy Spirit. The Jesus-event which was manifested in liberating movements, therefore, had been taking place in Korea long before the first Christian missionary set foot on Korean soil. As Hyung Young-hak states,

In other words, the spiritual presence of God is presupposed in the liberating movement of the minjung. God, through the Holy Spirit works in the acts of the minjung and in acts of liberation in the past, present and future.

The movement of the Holy Spirit is another theme in minjung theology. In stressing the importance of the Holy Spirit minjung theologians tend to move away from the

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132 A number of well-known events of minjung struggle in the history of Korea are regarded as most significant for minjung liberation. In Suh Nam-dong's "Historical References for a Theology of Minjung," in Minjung Theology, pp. 169-171, he lists fourteen such events, some dating back as far as the twelfth century.

133 Jung Young Lee, op. cit., p. 12.

134 Hyung Young-hak, "A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea," Minjung Theology, p. 54.
Christo-centric approach to theology which is characteristic of traditional theology. Suh Nam-dong calls this "the pneumatological historical interpretation" which he contrasts with "the traditional christological interpretation." Because of the movement of the Holy Spirit, the direct revelation of God is available in Korea and in other places without explicit connection with or reference to Christian tradition. Because the act of God manifests itself in the Spirit, any act that implies the liberation of the minjung from oppressive situations can be understood as the Jesus-event or the act of God.

In this understanding, institutional Christianity loses significance. What is important for minjung theology is the direct act of the Holy Spirit for the liberation of the minjung and their han. The world is more important than the so-called church, for the church is designed to foster the world of justice. That just world is symbolized in the Messianic Kingdom.

A third theme in minjung theology is the Messianic Kingdom and the Millenium. For the minjung, the only non-violent hope they have is the advent of the Messiah or the righteous ruler who comes to restore justice and establish the Messianic Kingdom. In this context, the idea of millenium is important because it emphasizes 'this world'; an emphasis which is seen to be much closer to the idea of the Messianic Kingdom the early Church associated with the second coming of

135 Suh Nam-dong, "Historical References for a Theology of Minjung," *Minjung Theology*, p. 177.
Christ. Minjung theologians stress that the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached was never meant to be an other-worldly place or an after-life reality. Rather, it was meant to be a concrete and real world where justice and the love of God would be actualized in real-life situations. The actualization of this messianic kingdom is implicit in the second coming of Jesus, the true Messiah. Minjung theologians, therefore, stress the eschatological dimension of the gospel. In the second coming, the millenium or the Messianic Kingdom will be established on earth.

5. Evaluative Comments.

Certainly, there are crucial theological problems raised by this theology which need some clarification. For example, does the political vision that flows from hope of God's reign necessarily comprise a radical critique of power and a consequent renunciation of power? The assertion by minjung theologians of God's self-revelation before and apart from Christ and linking that self-revelation with historical events turn history into what is in some sense a second source of revelation. Is it theologically tenable to say as minjung theologians do that the minjung "must achieve their own


137 ibid., p. 15.
salvation"? Or, to identify 'messianic' movements or charismatic personages with Jesus of Nazareth?

However, our purpose in this chapter precludes us from entering into a detailed discussion of these issues. It will therefore be sufficient to point out that in spite of all the apparent problems, minjung theology is one of the most creative theologies emerging from the political struggles of Asian peoples. On the one hand, it serves as an example of what Korean Christians in particular and Asians generally are doing to liberate themselves from the stifling effects of European theology. But on the other hand, minjung theology is more than a rejection of European theology; it is an affirmation of Korean culture and history as the context in which Koreans must do theology.

F. Summary

What we have said in the last sentence about Korean minjung theology can also be said of Asian theology in general. Underlying the various attempts of Asian Christians to formulate an indigenous theology is a desire to break away from the western mold of theologizing governing Christian understanding and which had for so long captivated Asian creativity and ingenuity.

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138 Suh Nam-dong, op. cit., p. 166.

139 See essays dealing with many of these issues in An Emerging Theology. See, especially the Appendices in pp. 183-196.
The indigenous movements among Indian Christians in the late nineteenth century represent a theological development taking place within the Asian Churches. It represents a development aimed at making sense of the Christian faith in the concrete existential situation of Asia. The common focus of this attempt is to allow the Asian experience—historical, religious, cultural—to take its rightful place in the interpretation of the Christian faith.

In the process of indigenization, we have seen how Indian, Japanese and Korean theologians have sought to appropriate and adopt traditional religious terminologies and philosophical ideas to fit, to match or to explain what they believe to be the universal Christian ideas or doctrine. Today many Asians continue to utilize indigenous terms and ideas such as dvaita, advaita, avatars, dukkha, yoga, ying-yang, jen, etc., in their interpretation of the Christian faith. In addition to these, there are also the realities of human existence in Asia—suffering, poverty, political and economic exploitation, social injustices, etc. These provide basic themes for doing theology in Asia today.

Russell Chandran speaks of the common experience of most Asians in terms of: 1) Rival faiths claiming the loyalty of great masses of people; (2) a growing apathy of Asian intellectuals toward traditional religions and a new confidence in science and technology for the improvement of man's lot; (3) most Asian countries having only recently emerged out of colonial domination; (4) masses of people in the grip of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and allied social evils; (5) the presence of reactionary forces in most Asian countries, retarding the progress of human development. All these have contributed to a new sense of "Asian solidarity." See J. Russell Chandran, "Confessing the Faith in Asia Today," SEAJT, Vol. 8, nos. 1 & 2 (1966), pp. 91-94.
In the trends of indigenization we have described above, the emphasis on Asian cultures and histories (religions, cultures, suffering, peoples, etc) has been apparent. All these trends reflect an existential self-affirmation of Christians in Asia. They point to the Asian search for "theological freedom" which is, according to John Macquarrie, "the right, within limits, to stress viewpoints and use method which, in the situation, seem to need stressing."\textsuperscript{141}

CHAPTER 3: ISSUES OF INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY.

A. The Challenge of Contextualization.

Since the colonial era came to an end following World War 2, there has been increasing frustration with the nineteenth-century formulation of the indigenized church by the younger churches in their search for self-identity and their enthusiasm to participate in the national life of their new nations. The urban churches have felt the impact of the modern technological revolution and the drift to secularism. Independence has brought with it new social, economic and political factors which are radically affecting the lifestyle of the people. The widening knowledge of anthropology and sociology has helped to create a new self-awareness and cultural sensitivity. All these point to the radical changes which characterize the reality of the present world.

This situation of revolutionary changes prompted the need for a radical renewal of the church in all aspects of her life. Consequently a new word "contextualization" emerged in connection with the quest for the renewal of theological education. As we mentioned in chapter 1, the term 'contextualization' was introduced through the WCC's Theological Education Fund (TEF) in its report, Ministry in Context. The report introduces the TEF's Third Mandate as a response to the universal crisis of faith and search for meaning in life; the urgent issues of human development and social justice; the dialectic between a universal
technological civilization and local culture and religious situations.¹

Contextualization, it is claimed, is "the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation," and this capacity is regarded as "a chief characteristic of authentic theological reflection." Not simply a fad nor just a catchword, it is "a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the Word."² As the report suggests, contextualization implies all that is involved in the familiar term indigenization, but seeks to press beyond it to take into account "the process of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice which characterized the historical moment of nations in the Third World."³

In the view of the directors of the TEF, the term "indigenization" connotes a static, traditional view of culture that largely neglects wider dimensions of a group's total context. Coe writes:

Indigenous, indigeneity, and indigenization all derive from a nature metaphor, that is, of the soil, or taking root in the soil. It is only right that the younger churches, in search of their own identity, should take seriously their own cultural milieu. However, because of the static nature of the metaphor, indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of traditional culture. Therefore it is in danger of being past-oriented... But the most important factor since the last war, has been the new

² ibid., p. 19.
³ ibid., p. 20.
phenomenon of radical change. The new context is not that of static culture, but the search for the new, which at the same time has involved the culture itself.Obviously, Coe wants to go beyond the concept of indigenization because he thinks it is somewhat limited in scope. It is static in nature, "in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of traditional culture." That is, it tends to be narrowly confined to a particular dimension of the local context. It is therefore backward rather than forward-looking. And in that respect it is unable to cope with the new phenomenon of radical change.

The newer word contextualization thus became more preferable. Not only does it convey all that is implied in the older term, but it also extends the meaning of indigenization to include the other afore-mentioned concerns. Contextualization recognizes the continually changing nature of every human situation and of the possibility for change. And for that reason it is considered a dynamic rather than a static process. It is "future-oriented" and "open to change." Contextualization furthermore seeks to clarify the process by which the gospel not only takes on the forms of different cultures but also maintains the critical stance that seeks to transform culture. The fundamental concern of contextualization is a mission of incarnation in the world, where God's redeeming activity and salvation is focused in the

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5 ibid., p. 21.
general historical context.

Coe contends that not all contexts are equally strategic for the Missio Dei. Contextuality, he claims, involves a critical assessment of what makes the context really significant in the light of the Missio Dei. It is the missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it. Thus, contextuality is more than taking all contexts seriously but indiscriminately. It is the conscientization of the context in the particular historical moment, assessing the peculiarity of the context in the light of the mission of the church as it is called to participate in the Missio Dei. It is the raising of people’s critical awareness about their concrete context which comes through involvement and participation. Such awareness should engender a capacity to respond to the gospel in the light of what goes on in that particular context.

Authentic contextuality then leads to contextualization. The two cannot be separated. The dialectic between contextuality and contextualization indicates a new way of theologizing. It involves not only words, but actions. Through this, the inherent danger of a dichotomy between theory and practice, action and reflection, the classroom and the street should be overcome. According to Coe, authentic theological reflection can only take place as the "theologia in loco," discerning the contextuality within the concrete context. But it must also be aware that such authentic theological reflection is at best, but also at most, theologia viatorum;
and therefore contextuality must be matched by the contextualization which is an ongoing process. 6

There is, in the introduction and adoption of the new terminology by the TEF directors, an obvious implication with regard to the usefulness and validity of indigenization as a principle for theology. To suggest that contextualization is a more comprehensive term than indigenization, because it is capable of including the process of "secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice" implies that the principle of indigenization, however useful it may have been in the past, is no longer needed. The suggestion that contextualization expresses "a deeper concept than indigenization ever does" consolidates this observation. 7 Moreover, the fact that an increasing number of missiologists and theologians have followed the lead of the TEF directors strongly indicates that indigenization, indeed, is more or less out of theological demand. But if indigenization is to be discarded, or, if in fact it ceases to be seen as a useful missionary and hence theological procedure, then the validity of an 'indigenous theology' subsequently falls into question.

This raises three important issues: (1) Is it necessary, as some seem to think, to replace the term indigenization by contextualization? (2) What do we mean by indigenous

6 ibid., pp. 21-2.

theology? (3) Is there a place for such a theology? What theological basis can we claim for doing theology indigenously? The rest of this chapter will be taken up in a discussion of these questions.

B. Indigenization Or Contextualization?

In attempting to answer the first question, it would seem appropriate to examine some of the arguments for and against indigenization which have arisen within the context of the so-called "indigenization-contextualization debate."8

1. For and Against Indigenization.

Influenced to some degree by the introduction of the newer term, an increasing number of theologians and missiologists have, following Coe's example, opted for a stark rejection of "indigenization". Visser t' Hooft rejects its use because of its (a) anachronistic, paternalistic flavour; (b) ambiguity in meaning and, (c) lack of temporal dimension.9 Alfred C. Krass considers indigenization inadequate for viewing culture and the socio-historical

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realities of the modern world. C. S. Song regards the concept as militating against the universality of the gospel. He believes the concern of mission is not primarily how indigenous the church and theology are, nor how much one can make use of a particular cultural form to communicate the gospel. The important concern is whether the church and theology are obedient instruments to manifest the love of God in Christ in discovering what that love is saying to a culture.

Although "indigenization" as understood by some tends to define culture in static traditional terms and is limited to a focus on the cultural dimension only, others employ the term in a dynamic sense that places full weight on the metaphor of taking root in the soil and growing. Sung Bum Yun, for example, takes up the biblical metaphor of seed and soil to explain the concept of indigenization. If the gospel is the seed and the mind is the soil, then "theology is the study of the relation between the seed and the soil". The steps of indigenization include selection and preparation of the soil by reflection on cultural traditions, and the need for self-negation, that is, dying in the soil in order to bear fruit. Beeby thus claims that all good theology is "indigenized theology" in the sense that it "fits the minds

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and questions of the time and place where it appears ... [It is] God's word to the needs of the day." In other words, indigenous theology is an attempt to have the Christian message "expressed in ways understood by [sic] the people and enmeshes with or gears into ... the problems and questions of the day." 13

Previous to his adoption of the term contextualization, Charles R. Taber used indigenization to define the process by which a message that is initially alien takes on a shape more congenial to the total receptor context. A dynamic process as in the model which sees "Gospel and culture as meeting in the midst of a trajectory of change and from the moment of contact mutually affecting and altering each other." 14 Charles H. Kraft proposes to maintain continuity with the traditional usage of indigenization while correcting static notions of the term by introducing the concept of "dynamic indigeneity." What this involves is

the creation within the receiving culture of something new which is the result of fertilization from outside but may bear little formal resemblance to the source culture system. 15

James O. Buswell, whilst accepting contextualization, warns that "we should think twice before rejecting the terms

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indigenous, indigeneity and indigenization" on the grounds employed in Coe's argument. Buswell argues that in the first place, there is nothing necessarily static about the concept. Etymologically, the concept involves Latin morphemes meaning 'to bear or produce within.' Its English meaning, then, becomes "native; born, growing, or produced naturally in a country or a region." Now in Buswell's view, the beauty of "indigenous" for the label of a truly "contextualized" church is that the surest sign of such Christianity is when it is found to be, in fact, incorporated within the enculturative\textsuperscript{16} experience in the home! In other words, when the Christian home rears its children as Christians and the teachings and belief system of Christ is "born or produced within" the home, Christianity is indigenous within that culture. Thus Buswell concludes that,

the Christianity thus established need not be thought of as tied to any particular traditions of the past. It becomes a part of the society and its culture where it is, and may continue to be a part of it as it changes. Thus it may be as future-oriented as the people who accept it.\textsuperscript{17}

In general, both the arguments 'for' and 'against' indigenization have as a common framework the question of communicating the Gospel in cross-cultural situations. What seems to account for the difference in opinions is the

\textsuperscript{16} The word "enculturative" is an established anthropological terminology which means the socialization of a person within his/her own culture. It is the process by which a human infant becomes human culturally through interaction with his/her human environment.

discrepancy involved in the interpretation of the nature of indigenization. For those who wish to discard the concept in favour of contextualization, they do so mainly on the view that the focus of indigenization is limited to the cultural dimension only, thus ruling out other dimensions of the general historical context, particularly those of modernization, secularity and change. And because indigenization is concerned only with the culture, they believe the response to the gospel is "in danger of being past-oriented." But as Buswell has pointed out, this does not necessarily need to be so. Even if the focus of indigenization is limited to the cultural dimension only, it does not necessarily follow that it would tend to be backward-looking and unable to cope with the reality of change. Here, I would add that such a conclusion is possible only if 'culture' is understood in too narrow a sense. Let me try to clarify this point.

First of all, culture is a comprehensive term. As used in the social disciplines, it is understood in a much wider sense than that suggested by popular usage. In ordinary speech, culture is often used to refer to sophisticated tastes in art, literature, or music. But from a sociological perspective, culture refers to the entire way of life of a society. It is, according to a famous early anthropologist, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities acquired by
man as a member of society."\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, a contemporary sociologist defines culture as that which "consists of all the shared products of human society, both material and nonmaterial."\textsuperscript{19} In short, culture is the way of life of members of a human society in its totality. It is a "design for living" or a "plan according to which society adapts itself to its physical, social, and ideational environment."\textsuperscript{20} Culture encompasses everything pertaining to the life of a society in the past, present and future. It cannot be right, therefore, to speak of culture in some partial sense, say, traditional or modern or future.

Secondly, culture and society are closely interrelated terms. The existence and survival of one is dependent on the other. A society cannot exist without culture; a culture cannot exist without a society to maintain it. It follows therefore that all people could not live without it any more than fish could live out of water. Characteristically, culture is shared, held in common and holding together the members of the society, independent of and out–lasting the life of any single one, yet dependent on them as a group for its


\textsuperscript{20} The sociological understanding of culture is comprehensive. According to Joan Metge, it includes everything to do with human life; "people's daily work, their family life and their recreations, their language, rule of etiquette, their superstitions and prejudices, their beliefs, attitudes and values on every subject under the sun. Everything that people do often and/or enjoy doing is part of their culture, no matter where it came from originally." "Christ and Culture," \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 8, no. 3 (January 1967), p. 19.
perpetuation. Shared culture is what makes social life possible.

Thirdly, culture is neither instinctive nor physically inherited, but is entirely learned. "The learned ways of life, which are modified and passed on from one generation to the next, are what sociologists call 'culture'."21 It is the cumulative result of human discovery, invention and achievement, a set of particular answers to the universal problems of human existence, worked out in history by countless individuals and handed on by one generation to the next in a variety of ways. Without a culture transmitted from the past, each new generation would have to solve the most elementary problems of human existence over again. Culture enables us to adapt to the world around us. It provides a way for interpreting and understanding the environment. It is therefore a means for interpreting and responding to the whole of reality.

Finally, by virtue of the fact that people who create cultures do undergo changes in thinking and patterns of living from time to time, it follows that cultures also change. That is to say, no culture is ever static. Every culture goes through a process of continual change. But although all cultures change, they do so in different ways and at different rates. Under most conditions, cultural change is fairly slow. Culture tends to be inherently conservative, especially in its non-material aspects, for people are reluctant to give up old values, customs and beliefs in favour of new ones. But when

21 Ian Robertson, op. cit., p. 53.
changes do occur in one area of a culture, they are usually accompanied, sooner or later, by changes elsewhere. The following statement by Joan Metge sums up the various aspects of culture we have mentioned.

Cultures are partly a legacy from past generations which cannot be lightly discarded and partly what members of present generations make them; they are always in the process of modification, though at widely varying rates; both conservation and change are mediated through people; and individuals are not merely carriers of culture but participate in its continual re-creation and modification.

Let us now examine the grounds of Coe’s argument against indigenization in the light of this sociological understanding of culture.

Firstly, as we have seen, culture is a universal phenomenon of human life. It encompasses all human activity and thought. No process of human development can be understood outside of culture and society. Hence it goes without saying that the processes of secularity, technology, modernization and the struggle for human justice - which Coe and others claim to be excluded by indigenization and hence constituting its main limitations - are all part of peoples' life in society. Secularity, technology, modernization are the results of human ingenuity, creativity and progress. They are an inevitable part of a 'shared culture' - of community and social living. The concern of indigenization with culture, therefore, does take into account all these human processes. Whilst it may not be clearly spelt out in its agenda, the fact

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22 ibid., p. 74.

23 Joan Metge, op. cit., p. 22.
that indigenization is concerned with the response to the gospel in terms of culture means that the concern for the process of secularity, technology and the like is inherent in it. It is implicit in the meaning of culture.

A second point of Coe's argument against indigenization is that it tends to suggest a static response to the Gospel in terms of traditional culture. And because of that indigenization is in danger of being "past-oriented." I have already pointed to the error of talking about culture in a partial sense as in the words "in terms of traditional culture." It is meaningless because the concept of culture transcends time. Can there be a modern culture without a trace of traditional culture? And what traditional culture is free of modern cultural influences so that it remains ever traditional?

Cultural changes take place all the time within cultures. Whilst these changes occur at a variable rate, the fact remains that cultures exist in a continual process of change. No culture can ever remain static. Now if this is so, how can indigenization be said to be static in nature, and past-oriented? Obviously if indigenization is used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of culture, then it follows that when cultural changes happen, certain changes in the response to the Gospel are likely to be expected too. Indeed, the introduction of the word, 'contextualization' itself is an indication of the subtle changes in our response to the Gospel effected by cultural changes taking place in the contemporary historical situation. It cannot therefore be
true to say that indigenization is incapable of coping with the reality of change. The possibility of cultural changes is inclusive in the concern for a response to the Gospel in terms of culture.

Moreover, every culture as it accommodates changes, whether consciously or unconsciously, is always forward-looking. Every culture seeks to make progress into the future. And every culture does this by building on the accumulative knowledge of the past. Whilst the past is important, the main concern of all human beings is futuristic. No culture can afford to remain in the past if it wishes to survive at all. It would therefore seem nonsensical to speak of indigenization as being "in danger of being past-oriented." Since the response to the Gospel is never done outside of human culture, it would naturally take on board this human orientation towards the future. This would be necessary if the response to the Gospel is to be a 'living' response.

In this brief analysis of the argument against indigenization as represented by Coe in the light of the sociological understanding of culture, it is apparent that all of the fundamental points of the argument are no longer sustainable. And if this is so, is the replacement of indigenization by contextualization still a justifiable necessity? If our analysis is correct, then the answer would appear to be a definite no.
2. The Problem of Meaning.

Another central issue in the debate over indigenization and contextualization involves the question of meaning one attaches to these concepts. With regard to the concept of contextualization, Krikor Haleblian points out that whilst the meaning may be clear at the dictionary level, in the literature on the subject, "there is widespread confusion."²⁴ For instance, Kato understands contextualization to mean making concepts and ideas relevant to a given situation.²⁵ Others define the term as having to do merely with cross-cultural communication of the gospel.²⁶ Still others limit contextualization to the development of theology done locally.²⁷ Apparently, no consensus with regard to meaning is found in the literature on the subject.

The same thing is true of the concept of indigenization. In the previous chapters, we indicated that throughout the modern history of Christian mission, definitions of


²⁵ Byang H. Kato, loc. cit.,


indigenization have, on the whole, been focused on the question of the emancipation of Third World churches from Western mission control. However, many others have sought to clarify the concept of indigenization by making specific reference to individual aspects of the Church's life and work. Hence definitions of indigenization in various terms such as 'church leadership,' 'worship,' 'liturgy,' 'local church,' 'theological education' etc, are plentiful.

Obviously, no one definition seems comprehensive enough to give the precise meaning of the concept. David Edwards once made this observation in connection with discussions of Christian worship at the Uppsala Faith and Order Conference in 1968. He commented that diversity and lack of precision have surrounded conceptions of indigenization from the very beginning. The "old problem of indigenization, mentioned in many previous ecumenical meetings," has never been stated with


"enough theological precision." So there is obviously no general consensus with regard to the precise meanings of these two words.

Another related aspect of the problem is the question of the distinction between indigenization and contextualization. Indeed the two concepts are related to each other, but they are also distinct concepts. For, if they were not, there would not have been any need for inventing the newer word. The question of the distinction between the two terms is heightened by the fact that, since they are related and since both point to dynamic and social phenomena, they are often used interchangeably. Costa thinks such interchangeable usage inevitably deflates the peculiarities of the concepts. The distinction does not get any clearer when we examine some of the definitions of contextualization proposed by even those who wish to discard the older term in the belief that the newer one incorporates and goes beyond the old term. Two examples will suffice. First: Based on current definitions of the term, Krikor Halebian tentatively...


describes contextualization as, "that discipline which deals with the essential nature of the gospel, its cross-cultural communication, and the development and fostering of local theologies and indigenous church forms." 

Second: Charles R. Taber itemizes six ways in which contextualization is seen to go beyond indigenization:

(i) Indigenization focuses only on the cultural dimension, while contextualization includes social, political and economic questions. (ii) Indigenization tends to define culture in static, traditional terms, while contextualization emphasizes the processes of change and transformation in culture. (iii) Indigenization tends to view sociological systems as closed and self-contained; contextualization takes into account the global politico-economic and cultural context of each people. (iv) Indigenization is thought to be something that happens on the foreign field; contextualization sees that all cultures, including those of the West, manifest the demonic and the divine, and undergo the same processes. (v) Indigenization tends to deal with the surface expressions of the gospel, contextualization with the deep and universal dimensions. (vi) Indigenization is merely a transfer of authority from mission to the national church; contextualization presses for local autonomy from the beginning.

36 Krikor Haleblian, op. cit., p. 97.

In both these examples, there seems hardly anything mentioned about contextualization that is not already included in the agenda of indigenization. Take Halebian's definition of contextualization for instance. What he calls the "essential nature of the gospel" is nothing more than Revelation which defenders of indigenization affirm and take to be a central aspect of the interpretive task of indigenous theology. As for the "cross-cultural communication of the gospel" and the "fostering of local theologies", we have, in the course of the preceding pages, shown that these aspects have not been omitted in descriptions of indigenization. Implicit in the nature of indigenization itself is the goal of communicating the gospel cross-culturally and encouraging local Christians to formulate theologically their own responses to the Christian message.

Regarding Taber's itemization of ways in which contextualization goes beyond indigenization, let me quote in length Amalorpavadass's understanding of what indigenization means.

Indigenization does not refer exclusively or unilaterally to traditional cultures and religions. It is not a mere going back to the source, it is not a mere recognition of one's heritage. It means, above all, being present today and looking to the future, being taken up in the dynamism of personality development, group life and history. Indigenization takes account of all the realities that constitute human existence today, that shape the life of societies and nations, that mark the history of the world. Problems of hunger and disease, ignorance and illiteracy, unemployment and frustration, struggles of men for liberation from all the forces of slavery and alienation,...

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social justice and integral development of man, contemporary culture and its all pervading effects. Indigenization means solidarity with men and involvement in all issues and problems.... Thus indigenization is a concern for the contemporary reality as integrated in the culture and life of today's man. 39

In comparing this quotation with Taber's six items of comparison, there is no doubt that Amalorpavadass's description of indigenization does cover everything that Taber sets aside as peculiar to contextualization. Contrary to Taber's argument (e.g. first three items), Amalorpavadass points out that indigenization does not focus on the cultural dimension "exclusively or unilaterally." It does take into account "all the realities that constitute human existence" and the various forces that "shape the life of societies and nations." Indigenization is concerned with the "contemporary reality as integrated in the culture and life of today's man." 40 Now since it is concerned with the whole of contemporary human life, with all its "problems," "frustrations," "struggles for liberation" and so on, indigenization cannot be said to define culture "in rather static, traditional terms." Indigenization is concerned with the present as well as the future. While the present may have its roots and moorings in the past, its dynamic orientation is towards the future. In sum, what Taber sees to be the ways in which contextualization goes beyond indigenization are, according to Amalorpavadass, pertinent functions of indigenization as well.

39 D. S. Amalorpavadass, ibid., p. 19.

40 ibid., p. 20.
On the basis of this comparison, one can hardly make out any hard and fast distinction between the two concepts. It is therefore no surprise that some have been led to use the terms synonymously. With regard to the question we started with, there does not seem to be any necessary grounds for replacing indigenization with contextualization. In other words, the usage of one is as justifiable as the other. Thus for those who prefer the newer term to the older, it may be best to do so, not as a matter of necessity but simply as a matter of preference. That is to say, since there is no general agreement as to what these terms precisely mean, the option must still remain open. Whether one opts for indigenization or contextualization must depend on personal choice. After all, as Nicholls has observed, "in the end it is not so much the word used as the meaning that grows up around it that is important." 41

C. What is Indigenous Theology?

Having dealt with our first question, let us now turn to the second one. I have argued that indigenization is still a viable option. Since there is inadequate grounds for replacing 'indigenization' at all, the possibility of indigenizing theology is very much assured. In other words, it is possible to speak of an "indigenous theology" as much as one is able to speak of a philosophical theology,

systematic theology, political theology, or contextual theology. For the purpose of our study, the question that needs to be reconsidered is the age-old question of the nature of indigenous theology. What is indigenous theology? A look at how the term has been defined seems appropriate at this point.

Understandably, the variety of attempts to express what is meant by "indigenous theology" strongly reflect the lack of precision and the diversity of perceptions to which we pointed previously in relation to the term indigenization. Referring specifically to India, Devadutt defines indigenous theology as "the urge for self-expression of one growing to maturity." By this is meant an attempt, on the part of Indian Christians to think, reflect, and express theologically their own response to the Christian message without having to imitate, repeat or depend on how others have interpreted the biblical message. Indigenous theology is therefore to do with the interpretation of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ; an interpretation which arises from the activity of God in and through the individual and corporate experiences of Indian Christians, and the peculiar ethos to which they have become heirs. 42

What Devadutt seems to be stressing in his definition is the interpretation of the gospel in and through the cultural experiences, worldview and categories of thought of the Indian Christians. It is an attempt to express the content of the gospel theologically by taking seriously the historical

42 V. E. Devadutt, ibid., p. 46.
context in which they find themselves in the conviction that God speaks to them through their own experiences as Indian people in the same way that God is believed to have been experienced by the Israelite and Europeans in the course of their own respective histories.

Others share similar views. Saphir Athyal asserts that the task of theology of any people is to articulate their understanding of the eternal truth in terms of their given locale and context. Thus one is able to speak of a German, a British, or an American theology, or the Reformation, the 19th century or the contemporary theology, though the core of thought which all these different systems attempt to embody remains the same. The truth of the christian gospel, he adds, is never abstract but a message that takes concrete forms and continues to have a dialogue with the believers in their daily practical situations. The task of indigenous theology in the situation of Asia therefore is to address to the Gospel questions of real import arising out of people’s life experiences, as individuals as well as a social group.\(^43\)

Indigenous theology according to Albert Widjaja is not a theology which merely adjusts western theology into the thought-forms of the indigenous culture. Nor is it a ramification and elaboration of certain fundamental aspects of Western theology to meet the presuppositions of the native culture. Rather, it is,

\(^{43}\) Saphir P. Athyal, ibid., pp. 124-139.
a theology which seeks to be genuine in its commitment to the demand of the Gospel, seeks to be original in its perception of the challenges of the world in the light of the Gospel. It attempts to be relevant to the society yet faithful to its Lord.\textsuperscript{44}

From an existential perspective, Beeby defines indigenous theology as "God's Word to the needs of the day." That means an expression of the Gospel message in ways understood of the people and enmeshes with or gears into the problems and questions of the day. It is a,

biblically grounded declaration or statement addressed to or arising out of special circumstances ... an ad hoc solution to a crisis in a church's life, a guideline to believers faced with the novelties in the moral life .... an interpretation of scripture from new viewpoints.\textsuperscript{45}

Indigenous theology is an alignment of a modern bondage and oppression, including the consequent search for liberation, with similar periods in the biblical story so that deeper understanding may result and new insights into the biblical records may be gained. It is a biblically based critique of accepted traditions, mores, outlooks, hopes, ideals, ideologies, presuppositions, prejudices - in fact anything which would otherwise inform, influence, or determine our decision.

There are some fundamental tenets in Beeby's description of indigenous theology which are worth noting. Firstly, the significance of the Bible as the Word of God is explicitly stated. Indigenous theology has to do with the interpretation


\textsuperscript{45} H. D. Beeby, op. cit., p. 36.
of the Bible in relation to the immediate real and existential circumstances of people's life. Secondly, there is an obvious emphasis on the "present" in Beeby's view of indigenous theology. He writes, "Indigenous theology is by the Bible out of the present."\textsuperscript{46}

The underlying assumption is that it is in the present moment that people have to do with in the business of living. But this present does not come in systems. Rather it comes as a never ending series of joys, sorrows, challenges, failures, successes, irritations, responses, new situations to cope with, and so on. Above all, the present makes demands on people to decide as to what course of action ought to be undertaken. Thus for Beeby, the important question for the christian is this: What does the Bible say in view of these demands for decision? How does my decision stand up to the revelation given in the Bible? Such questions would involve one in doing indigenous theology.

Finally, Beeby's understanding of indigenous theology focuses on the critical function of theology in relation to the conflicts of human existence where the task of decision-making is an essential and vital part of people's everyday activity. For this reason, he stresses the nature of indigenous theology as a piecemeal activity - "a thing of rags and patches" - because it emerges out of peculiar, specific situations.\textsuperscript{47} It is a "conflict theology" because it seeks to understand the message of the Gospel from the perspective of

\textsuperscript{46} ibid., p. 35.

\textsuperscript{47} ibid., p. 36.
situationally present demands for decisions. At the same time, it seeks to express that message in ways appropriate to the crises experienced by human beings.

M. M. Thomas defines indigenous theology as a creative endeavour to bring out new facets of the truth and meaning of the person of Jesus Christ and his salvation. An endeavour which reckons with the context of the traditional and contemporary life and thought of a particular people. For Thomas, the contemporary reality of his native India, that is, the traditional one renewed under the impact of the West and of the Indian renaissance is important in any effort to articulate the Christian message. The historical situation of any people is thus of crucial importance in any theological reflection on the meaning of the Christian gospel. In a similar vein, Koyama defines the concept of indigenous theology as "theological reflection seeking a responsible reception and rooting of the christian gospel in a given locality". This reception and rooting of the gospel in given localities constitute a historical process. Some define indigenous theology as having to do merely with cross-cultural communication or the translation of the gospel into the

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48 ibid., p. 38.


thought-forms of the receiving people. Others limit indigenization to a "form of local theology;" one specifically related to the people whose lives and histories are bound up with a particular place or a geographical locality.

As far as we can gather from the above descriptions of the subject, no real uniformity is found. There is rather a variety of conceptions of indigenous theology. Definitions vary according to the differing perspective of Christians. Nevertheless, a number of common elements are seen to be present in the various formulations of what indigenous theology is and what it seeks to do. By drawing upon these elements of commonality, it is possible to postulate some thoughts on what indigenous theology entails. Eventually we might be able to formulate a working definition of indigenous theology.

First of all, characteristic of most descriptions of indigenous theology is an emphasis on two fundamental realities. On one side, there is the Gospel message with its demands for ultimate concern and purity of intention; a message believed to be one and the same for Christians of the first century as well as for those in the present and in years to come. At the centre of this message is God-in-Jesus; the transcendent yet personal and gracious God who loves humanity so much that God took human form in the man Jesus Christ, died


and rose again so that all humanity, through faith and obedience may be redeemed from all unrighteousness.

On the other, there is the human situation with its problems and dreams, difficulties and desires, frustrations and hopes, etc. Presupposed in formulations of indigenous theology is the recognition that each cultural area has particular problems which must be analysed and which the Word of God must illumine and criticize. The fundamental concern of the indigenous theologian is to pay attention to both these realities of the christian life. In indigenizing theology one must, as Bevans explains, "discern the situation, listen to God's word and, in the light of these, reinterpret the Christian message for man of today."\textsuperscript{53}

Secondly, intrinsic to this double emphasis is another important element, namely, the existential (historical) dimension of the theological activity. Indigenizing theology is to do with people in the actual business of living. In reality, this living is always understood in particularistic and concrete, never in universal or abstract terms. Indigenous theology therefore is reflection on and within a particular situation, making the Word of God and God's salvific action in Christ Jesus into a challenge to human beings to conform to his demands here and now. It is reflecting and expressing the christian faith that takes into account the immediate and concrete historical situation of the community in which the reflecting and expressing is done. Indigenous theology, again

Bevans writes,

is the reflection in faith and upon faith of a subject who is converted both to the Ultimate as revealed in the person of Christ, and to himself, revealed in his radical historicity - a person at 'this' time, in 'this' place, of 'this' language group.\(^5^4\)

Thirdly, as the previous sentence indicates, indigenous theology is concerned with the language of a particular social group. Indigenous theology, as a mode of reflection upon the christian faith, aspires to express the content of that faith in "the language of the people."\(^5^5\) This is not meant to be taken narrowly in terms of words and sentence structures used, but broadly in terms of culturally founded categories of thought: concepts, imageries, symbols and so on. What is aimed for in such a language is intelligibility. The main objective is an understanding of the faith that is necessary for growth and human transformation. Or, the faith understanding which may lead people to an integration of it with their whole life conduct.

The fourth point is closely related to the previous one. Inherent in the attempt of indigenous theology to use the language of the people is a genuine interest in the people themselves. The welfare of people as human beings is seen to be of utmost importance. Charles Nyamiti's ideas concerning the reason for doing theology at all brings this out clearly. In his book, African Theology: Its Nature, Problems and Methods, he suggests that theology must be done out of

\(^{5^4}\) ibid., p. 53.

\(^{5^5}\) Charles Taber, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology," p. 67.
pastoral concern, that is, with the well-being of persons in view. It is not a detached, abstract exercise, but a determined effort to use this particular tool to help the church be the church, to help Christians grow, to help non-Christians come to Christ. This approach, "based as it is on the love of God and the Church, demands great sanctity on the part of the theologian." It also "leads the theologian to the tackling of real problems in theology," that is, he will avoid sterile discussions to work on matters that matter to the people he is serving. Finally, the pastoral-minded theologian will naturally adapt theology to his people in such a way that they may not only easily understand Christian doctrine, but also be impelled to live the divine mysteries.

In order to serve this general end, Nyamiti goes on to develop three methods: the 'apologetical', which both points to the deficiencies of non-Christian religions and to the sufficiency of the Christian faith; the pedagogical, which serves the needs of growing Christians; and the comparative, which builds on the other two and goes beyond them in relating to the non-Christian or pre-Christian background of thought and life. But the central focus is the service of the church, of people. For him, theology that does not find its use in the conversion and edification of persons in Christ has no use.

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57 ibid.,

58 ibid.,
Indigenous theology, therefore, holds the welfare of the human community at heart; it is people-oriented.

Others have made much the same point. For example, Koyama insists that a genuine interest in theology and a genuine interest in the people go together. He says,

Theology's central subject "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt. 16: 15) cannot be answered in South East Asia today without participating in Jesus' interest in people as expressed in his call "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19: 5). Theological reflection in South East Asia must not begin by studying Augustine, Barth and Rahner with an English-Indonesian (or English-Chinese, or English-Thai) dictionary nearby. It must begin with an interest in people. 59

Wink suggests that we must move "toward a mode of Bible study which facilitates transformation in human lives." 60 He adds that the aim of biblical study must be to interpret the Scriptures such that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation. 61

The previous point leads directly to our final one, namely the question of methodology. If the aim of theology is to facilitate human transformation, to bring people to understanding and to growth in faith and conduct, how should it be done? The answer is: by adopting a methodological approach that best serves the avowed purpose of theology, namely, to serve the Christian community. By adopting another


61 ibid., p. 2.
form of theological expression which takes into serious consideration the diversity of cultures and the particularities of historical situations in which peoples live and exist. And that other method of theological expression is what indigenous theology is intended to be.

Theology, it is important to remember, is not found in books, but in people's minds. Theology is not a bunch of data, a mass of knowledge that is to be learned or taught. Theology happens when one begins to express oneself within a spirit of faith. Theology is method; it is inquiry itself. Theology is arriving at a deeper self-conscious knowledge of the faith, and the path to this knowledge is the same as that which leads to any other knowledge. One experiences, one understands and organizes the experience into a concept, one judges the concept as correct or incorrect, and one integrates this new knowledge into one's life by deciding whether or not to live according to it. Indigenous theology is thus a methodology for articulating the Christian understanding of the faith.

A fundamental presupposition underlying the need for indigenous theology is that the predominant method (Western) in which theology has been done in the past has not adequately served the needs of the younger Churches. Ever since the period of the Fathers, the church in the West has continued to use the same type of tools - of philosophy and of law - to express the content of the Christian faith and to dialogue with people of other religious persuasion. Borrowing from a

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succession of different philosophical systems: from Plato through Aristotle down to existentialism and process philosophy, the church in the West has sought to develop theological systems of enormous profundity and sophistication. But it has done so at the cost of an ever-deepening gulf between the theologian and the lay Christian, even the one who is fairly well educated. In effect, Western theology has become a discourse of experts for experts just like any other technically specialized discipline.

Now since Christianity came to other lands via the medium of the West, Christians in the younger churches were led to believe, consciously or unconsciously, that the only valid way of doing theology is that which conforms to the theological systems of Western Churches. But with the passage of time, it came to be realized that the Western formulation of the gospel has become an obstacle rather than an incentive for the acceptance and appropriation of the Good News in other places. It became apparent that the gospel has come to be viewed negatively because it is Western in mode and form, and it is alien because it is highly technical and complex. For these reasons, the Western mode of theologizing, despite its merits, is considered inappropriate for articulating the faith in non-western contexts.

63 Charles Taber, ibid., p. 65.
Various eloquent expressions of this lack of fit could be cited. Let me quote a few of these. According to Holth:

There are certain features of traditional Western theology which many Asians find objectionable. Generally speaking, Asians do not attach the same importance to formulated doctrines. Our keenness for analysis and system is something they find quite incomprehensible... Our demand for definite and precise formulations of faith is a source of irritation. The rigidity of much of Western theological dogmatism leaves the Asian man of religion cold.  

In examining the prevalent form in which theology has been done, Nyamiti notes that,

Classical theology abounds in such intrinsic or organic uses of philosophical categories: God is a real 'substance,' 'three 'persons'; grace is a true 'habitus'; sacraments are true 'causes' of grace, having 'matter' and 'form'. Let the reader recall to mind also the classical philosophical themes of essence, potency, nature, accident, etc... Examples of modern categories introduced in this way into theology are: encounter, intersubjectivity, I-Thou relation, alienation, openness, existential, interiority, to-be-in-the-world, historicity, etc.

Nyamiti's context points out that these are strictly western, not universal categories of thought. And just because these 'philosophical categories' are western does not mean that they ought to be regarded as normative for all theologies. The following statement by Khin Maung Din implicitly suggests this.

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I am not denying the witness of the Scriptures. But my purpose here is to question the validity of translating the mostly poetical, mystical and religious language of the Bible into only one class of philosophical concepts. If the Church in Burma desires to speak about God in more than poetical or mystical terms, it must also use a theological language derived from the Oriental theological experience.  

In other words, there is no reason why the Biblical message cannot be translated into the language most familiar to Burmese Christians, and in terms of conceptual categories that are rooted in Burmese culture. Peter Lee of China makes much the same point when he states:

Understandably, the Chinese are usually unattuned to Western theology with its heavy theoretical accent; conversely, Chinese indigenized theology should reflect the Chinese equipoised attention to knowledge and action or theory and practice.

Similarly, Dyson writes, "All theological categories emerge from, and are responses to, contexts of one kind or another." In other words, the character of any theology reflects, to a large extent, the conceptual frames of reference or categories of thought which are typical of the people in a particular historical setting.

In the light of what has been said about indigenous theology, I would now sum up my observations in the following propositions: First, indigenous theology must seek to express the content of the Christian faith in relation to the

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68 A. O. Dyson, "Dogmatic or Contextual Theology?" Study Encounter, Vol. 8, no. 3 (1972), p. 5.
immediate, real and existential circumstances of a people's life. Such expression is based primarily on reflection upon the biblical message of the love of God in Christ Jesus and how this message is to be understood in the context of a particular faith community.

Second, indigenous theology must be formulated in the "language of the people," not merely in terms of linguistic structure, but in terms of culturally founded conceptual categories and/or imagery.

Third, indigenous theology must use a methodology, that is a logic and a set of procedures which make sense in the cultural context. Fourth, indigenous theology must address itself to issues of real urgency; issues that the people for whom theology is done are most concerned with. For indigenous theology to avoid irrelevancy, it should resolutely ignore questions that do not emerge in the context. This may well mean that indigenous theology will say nothing about the controversial questions that have engaged the minds of Christians in the history of the Western Churches. It may also mean that new questions and burning issues requiring immediate solution will be raised; issues which never occurred at all to theologians in the Western mold.

Fifth, indigenous theology must use literary forms and genres that are culturally appropriate to the formulation of the most serious religious discourse. This may be poetry or mythology. It may be folk-tales, legendary traditions, oratory speeches or some other narrative form. It may be a wisdom type of text, genealogies; or it may find appropriate philosophical
forms within the culture. But whatever form it adopts, theology must always remember its true vocation, to serve the people of God; and it cannot serve its purpose unless it is intelligible to them. Sixth, indigenous theology is a communal venture. It must emerge from the community of believers. As Holth says,

Fr. Schmidlin is no doubt right when he says that methods of adaptation should spring spontaneously from the impulse of indigenous Christians to find their own ways of expressing their religious faith.  

In a similar vein, Wink calls for "communal exegesis" to overcome the "expert ethos." Indigenous theology must be such as to invite the Christian community to participate actively and integrally in the life to which it gives verbal formulation. This calls for a much more involved, a much less objective theology than is customary in the West.

Finally, indigenous theology, as I see it, is basically a methodological approach to the expression of the Christian faith that seeks to best serve the Church in a particular historical, socio-cultural setting. It does this by interpreting the message of the bible in the categories of thought most familiar to the people involved thus enabling them, by means of their consequent faith response, to make a unique contribution to the understanding of the Christian faith. Indigenous theology is a deliberate attempt on the part of the Christian Church to draw on the resources of a culture - linguistic, social, philosophical, religious, political,

69 Sverre Holth, op. cit., p. 9.

70 Walter Wink, op. cit., p. 63.
economic, etc. - to express the theological components of the Christian faith and heritage by means of them, in the belief that they are capable of so doing, and indeed, do so more adequately for the indigenous people. Included in the agenda of indigenous theology is a conscious attempt to address particular historical issues (societal, ethical, political, economical, etc.) in a given culture in the belief that: (a) current formulations of the Christian message have been formulated to address issues in another culture, and are therefore to that extent misdirected and need revision. (b) It is the responsibility of the Christian community to respond to, and to address such issues in an appropriate and challenging way.

Let us turn now to our third and final question, that is, concerning the legitimacy of indigenizing theology.

D. Indigenous Theology - A Legitimate Approach?

We have pointed out earlier that the concept of Indigenous Theology is part and parcel of the modern missionary movement. It was clearly a direct and logical outcome of the indigenization process. It was consequential to the missionary need to establish self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches overseas. Indigenous theology therefore is a concept born out of necessity. Indigenization in mission called for an indigenization of theology.
However, whilst this may have been an unquestionable principle among mission circles in the last century, indigenous theology, generally speaking, does not seem to enjoy the same degree of acceptability any longer. Not only has the necessity of indigenous theology come to be a somewhat questionable matter, but the legitimacy of the whole enterprise has in recent years become an issue of great theological import. In an article called "The Question of Indigenous Theology", Margaret Brown writes:

At present the term 'indigenous theology' is frequently used almost as a slogan, covering a multitude of yet-unquestioned delights. Whether it is a slogan or a necessary reality, the question of its legitimacy is being pressed by a number of programmatic developments occurring in the mission of the Church on all six continents.71

What seems a clear implication of this statement is the uncertainty surrounding the term 'indigenous theology,' with regard to its functional viability.

There is an uncertainty about indigenization as a necessary theological activity; or as a legitimate approach to the theological task of expressing the truth of the christian faith. Such uncertainties prompt us to ask the questions which we will explore in the next sections, in the hope that we might be able to arrive at some solution as to whether or not indigenous theology is a necessary and legitimate activity.

For example: Can we find a biblical or theological basis for doing Indigenous Theology? Is there anything in the heart

of christian tradition which prompts people to do Indigenous Theology in the 20th century? What is there in classical theology which permits or invites this theological approach? Is there a point in classical theology where the demand for this way of theologizing is implied? In attempting to answer these questions, we will begin with what the task and purpose of "theology" entail, how this task has been carried out in christian history, beginning with the biblical writers themselves.

1. Indigenous Theology and the Biblical Message.

John Macquarrie has described theology as, "a study which through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available." In the light of this definition, three things can be taken to be characteristic of "Christian" theology. First: Christian theology presupposes participation in the Christian faith. Faith in the sense of a community of people who believe, trust and give themselves totally and freely to God in Christ as revealed in the Bible. Second: Christian theology presupposes the content of the Christian faith, namely, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ for the redemption of all creation. This is the focus of any theology that claims to be Christian. Third: the task of the christian theologian is to reflect upon that faith content

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(beliefs) and to try and express his/her understanding of it in as clear a language as possible, on behalf of the faith community to which he/she belongs. Putting all these in a nutshell, christian theology, as Anselm has so aptly described it, is "faith seeking understanding" — fides quaerens intellectum.

As such, theology is a human activity in which Christians engage with the purpose of articulating their understanding of the christian faith rooted in the message of the Bible. At the heart of the Christian gospel stands the central belief in the God who reveals Himself to the world in and through the life and person of Jesus Christ; in his birth, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, God effects the salvation for all. This is the core of the Christian faith. And the task of theology anywhere is to articulate the understanding of this eternal christian truth in such a way that believers may not only understand and appropriate it, but they may also continue to grow in faith and be transformed by it.

For obvious reasons, it is to be expected that the forms, the modes of thought, the actual words by which the central truth of the faith is expressed will vary from people to people and from place to place. Since theology is a human activity, it certainly cannot be divorced from a historical context or a faith community. According to Berkhof, the dogmatician simply cannot think through the Christian faith from a vantage point in eternity but always has to struggle
along in time and space.\textsuperscript{73}

Indeed, no theology is done in a vacuum. All theologies are influenced by their contexts. As Robert McAfee Brown has pointed out,

Theologies emerge out of a certain set of experiences, or out of a particularized historical context. ... The context and experience of the theologian are an important filter through which a theology receives expression.\textsuperscript{74}

Now when we look at the Bible, we find that this is quite true of the way the theologies of the New Testament writers came to be formed. Contrary to the once held view of the gospel writers as mere collectors and editors of gospel traditions — "scissors and paste men" — the evangelists are now recognized as individual theologians in their own right.\textsuperscript{75}

In other words, what we have in the gospels are the conscious attempts of the writers themselves to articulate their understanding of the Gospel message which they received. Similarly, the apostle Paul in his letters sought to express his understanding of the centre of the christian faith as it has been handed down through tradition. "For I delivered to you as of importance what I also received" says St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

\textsuperscript{73} Hendrikus Berkhof, Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{74} Robert McAfee Brown, "Context Affects Content: The Rootedness of All Theology," Christianity and Crisis (July 18, 1977), p. 170.

However, whilst the substance of the gospel which the New Testament writers seek to express is one and the same, their understanding of it and the articulation of their theological response are quite different in form and method. As examples of this, Norman Ericson cites Matthew's anti-Jewish polemic as contrasted with Luke's cosmopolitan appeal. Moreover, while Jesus is conceived by Matthew as the Messiah, in terms of the new people of God; the Lord of the Church and inaugurator of a new order and a new Law of righteousness based on love, Luke's understanding of the gospel emphasizes Jesus' Messiahship in terms of his Spirit-filled, divine mission of redemption and judgement. In the mission of Jesus, a new creation comes into being through the power of the Spirit, and in his person, the Kingdom of God becomes manifest in the present. Mark, from yet another different angle, presents Jesus as the manifestation of God's redemptive power expressed in word and deed. He is the Son of God, discipleship of whom requires acceptance of the cross. Hence what becomes clear in the New Testament is a variety of expressions of the same gospel core; there appears a distinctively Matthean theology, a Lukan theology, a Markan theology, Pauline theology and so on.

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Obviously, these differences in the theologies of the New Testament writers are due to the different contexts in which they found themselves. They each had different sets of experiences within the faith communities to which they belong. Each writer was faced with a variety of demands, different needs and problems. Subsequently, each writer was led to a certain disposition towards the expression of the one gospel. As Bornkamm points out with reference to the synoptic gospels, they are documents expressing a definite, though in each case very different, theology, which gives to each of them, without detriment to what they have in common, a more or less consistently and systematically developed theme, which makes it possible to recognize as their background, different communities with their particular problems and views.  

Recognizing that the New Testament literature arises out of context, Robert McAfee Brown says:  

there is nothing wrong with theology being contextually conditioned. There is no way in which a historical faith (christian) could be expressed other than through the cultural norms and patterns in which it is located." 

It is this same recognition which leads Norman Ericson to assert that the New Testament "is a prime example of contextualization." Using a number of passages as proof - (Acts 15: 1-29; I Cor. 8: 1 -10: 22; I Cor. 5: 1-8; Colossians 3: 18 - 4: 1) - he argues that there are patterns in the New Testament which indicate or suggest that the contextual approach to the task of theology is a valid 


80 Robert McAfee Brown, loc. cit., 

81 Norman Ericson, loc. cit.,
Now if the validity of so-called contextual theology is granted on the basis of the New Testament way of theologizing, by the same token, the same thing could be said of indigenous theology. If the New Testament provides the patterns for contextually-conditioned theology, it is not inconceivable to say the same thing of indigenous theology. This is because the fundamental concerns of both contextualization and indigenization are, as we have pointed out, more or less identical. They each have to do basically with the expression and communication of the Christian faith in a truly understandable manner to peoples in differing cultural situations.

By virtue of this functional identity, it is possible to say that Indigenous Theology has a firm biblical grounding in the contextualization of the gospel message by the New Testament theologians. In other words, the contextual patterns of theologizing in the New Testament lend support to the idea of indigenous theology; or, the contextualization of the gospel message in the New Testament legitimatizes indigenous theology.

2. Indigenous Theology and Christian History.

When we look at the way Christians have expressed their understanding of the christian message throughout history, we find that the context has always been the major factor, influencing the kinds of theologies that emerged. Thus early
Christians theologized in relation to questions raised in Alexandria or Constantinople, and their descriptions of the faith varied depending on whether they were preaching and writing in Alexandria or in Constantinople.

When the centres of theological concern moved north from Alexandria and west from Constantinople, the ways of doing theology were conditioned in new ways by the structure of the Latin language; abstractions became common, replacing the dynamic of earlier Hebraic forms. The medieval church used Aristotle as a way to shape theology, and this, too, affected the nuances of its content. Reformation theologies, as well as those of the modern world, have all been conditioned by the particular historical experiences of Christians.

In all these various periods of Christian history, the main concern has always been with the substance of the gospel, and how this could be expressed in a form that is relevant to the people concerned, without perverting that central core of the Christian message. This is why in the Early Church, the theological formulation of certain groups, with regard to the question of the person of Christ — (e.g. Ebionites, Gnostics, Arians, Apollinarians, Nestorians, Eutychians) — were regarded as heretical. Their understanding did not seem to remain true to the substance of the gospel as given in the scriptures.

Now, Indigenous Theology as a way of doing theology, begins with the assumption of the substance of the gospel as given once and for all. It does not seek to alter that in any way. Its main concern is with the "form" of presentation of the gospel message in a particular historical setting. In
this respect, it is continuous with the way theology has always been done throughout history. If this is the case, then should there be any doubt regarding the legitimacy of indigenizing theology?

3. Indigenous Theology and Incarnation.

Theologically, the legitimacy of indigenous theology is rooted in the Christian concept of revelation as expressed in the doctrine of incarnation. Christian theology, as we have pointed out, is based on the conviction that in the coming, humiliation, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth, we have to do with the revelation of the very heart of God. Christian reflection about revelation begins with the belief in its earthly character. That is, revelation is an event that happens, not in heaven, but on earth. As an earthly event, it is given in modes which befit the earthly character of human existence. This is quite a logical beginning point for Christian thinking about revelation. After all, earthly reality is the only one that human beings know.

For man in his present mode of existence, for reasons we cannot fathom, depends on the phenomenal reality within and around himself for the inspiration and nourishment of his spirit."82

Embodied in the belief about the earthly character of revelation is the realization of the unknowableness, or, in Berkhof’s words, the "hiddenness" of God. It presupposes that God can only be known by God. That humanity, being limited

Incarnation is the Christian doctrine which seeks to express this understanding of revelation. The doctrine expresses, so far as human words permit, the central belief that Godself, without ceasing to be God, has come amongst us, not just in but as a particular man at a particular time and place. God became incarnate in the man Jesus Christ. God made Godself fully known to human beings by becoming a human being. God used the natural and earthly human form to reveal Godself in order for natural and earthly beings to be able to see and comprehend what is divine.

Christian understanding of the Incarnation insists that in the Christ event, human beings are brought to a direct confrontation with God. Incarnation is a direct personal encounter between God and humanity. Unlike the indirect way in which God deals with humanity before the incarnation and through other religious tradition by means of prophetic inspiration, mystical experience, sages and holy men, "the incarnation represents a new and much more direct, face to face, way of personal encounter this side of the divide between infinite and finite."\(^8\)

The doctrine of incarnation thus represents a peculiarly Christian way of speaking about the God of the Bible. It expresses how Christians understand God's dealings with human beings and human beings' experience and knowledge of God.

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belief in incarnation amounts to saying: God has made Godself known in Jesus Christ. In him, God has condescended to the world (Berkhof). In him, God relates to humanity "not" that humanity might understand or relate to God, but because in God's Grace, God has chosen to do so.

In the man Jesus, Christians see the fullness of God. He is, according to one song writer, "God made manifest". Or, in the words of St. Paul, "In him dwelt the fullness of God bodily." Jesus Christ is therefore no less God. He is not a mere impression of God as some Christians have been tempted to think, but the complete manifestation of God himself. The love, goodness, mercy, forgiveness, humility, etc, we encounter in Jesus Christ are not a mere impression of God. These qualities are, as a matter of fact, reality of God's very being. These qualities constitute the essence of God himself. In Jesus Christ we meet God in person. He is the expression of the original loving reality of God.

Having said this much about revelation and incarnation, how are these to be related to Indigenous Theology? I believe that it is in these concepts that we find the theological basis for indigenous theology. Indigenous Theology must follow the pattern of incarnation.

Revelation presupposes something unknown to be unveiled. That something is Godself. In wanting to reveal Godself, God must have a purpose that needs to be communicated with humankind. To communicate, God has to speak the language that human beings can understand. In fact God in Jesus has become like human beings in all respect, except sin of course.
fact that God "chose" to reveal Godself in this human way, in
terms that are familiar to earthlings, shows that God desires
to reach out to human beings. But it also shows that God wants
to be understood; that God wants human beings to know that God
loves them in spite of all human indifference. Does not this
divine method suggest something of the way the message of the
gospel ought to be expressed? How can this divine approach to
the communication of God's love to human beings be anything
less than exemplary for the task of theology?

If the revelation of God through the Christ event is to
take root in a particular historical setting, the expression
of the message must be given in modes which are characteristic
of the reality of existence as people experience it. This is
imperative if communication is to take place at all between
the gospel and hearers in a particular place. This
communication process is what Indigenous Theology is primarily
concerned with.

The nature of incarnation as an event which happened at
a particular place at a particular time, is another aspect of
revelation which has important implications for indigenous
theology. Revelation as a direct personal encounter between
God and humanity suggests that the expression of the gospel
message ought to be particularized. The gospel ought to speak
directly and personally to people in their particular locale.
For only when the gospel is understood personally can a true
encounter take place between human beings and God. But
understanding can only be achieved if the gospel is expressed
in suitable forms. These forms are the earthen vessels (2
Cor. 4: 7) whose only value is to serve as containers of the treasure of revelation.\textsuperscript{84}

4. Indigenous Theology & Calvin's Concept of Accommodation

When we look at the language of incarnation, we find that there are precedents which lend support for the cause of indigenous theology. John Calvin, in describing revelation, used the word 'accommodation.' He saw in revelation a "divine accommodation." It is the act whereby God accommodates the knowledge of himself to the feebleness of the human mind by "stooping far below his proper height."\textsuperscript{85} It is the prohibition of images especially which led him to this expression. Against those who saw the 'natural' (images and idols) as a necessary and willing instrument for the revelation of the supernatural, Calvin argued that when God reveals Godself in visible and material forms, it is not because God likes that, but it is for our sake. God "lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children."\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "Accommodation - True or False," \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 8, no. 3 (January 1967), p. 8.


\textsuperscript{86} ibid., See also, Books I, x, 2; I, xi.
Here it would be worth noting that Calvin's concept of accommodation is based on a simplistic theory of words of the Bible. The Bible, Calvin insists, is the only source of man's knowledge of God, of God's will and works. There is thus a concealed assumption that the actual words of the Bible are the words of God himself; that God's mind is actually conveyed through the words of the bible. So when Calvin talks about accommodation, he thinks of God "accommodating" knowledge of Godself to frail, weak, and limited human beings. He believes that the language used to describe God is only a "mode of speaking" accommodated to our human capacity.

Hence, in discussing the question of the "repentance" of God (Gen. 6: 6) in relation to the doctrine of Providence, he says that the meaning is with respect to God's action; "it does not say how He is in himself, but as he seems to us". It is only a mode of expression to accommodate God's immensity to our frail and limited understanding. Because our weakness cannot reach God's height, any description which we receive of God must be lowered to our capacity in order to be intelligible. And the mode of lowering is to represent God not as God really is, but "as we conceive of him...." 87

Does this mean that God can only be partially known? That what we see in Jesus as the Bible portrays it is only an impression of God? Calvin's statement quoted previously does seem to suggest that. The implication is that revelation is really a matter of the mind only. But is that really so? Isn't what is accommodated to us through the words of the

87 ibid., Bk I, xvii.
Bible, a matter of the heart as well? We believe that accommodation is not solely a question of language or knowledge about God. It has to do with the very heart of God in relation to human beings. Indeed, as we have already explained, christian belief in Incarnation affirms that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. Jesus Christ manifests the fullness of God's reality. He manifests to us the reality of God's love, justice, forgiveness, faithfulness, etc. In him, God is saying to the world, I love you and I care for you. This is basically what the Good News is all about.

In accordance with Calvin's assumption about the Bible, he believes that the biblical writers themselves, in interpreting the gospel traditions handed down from the past, accommodated the central message in accordance with their own purposes. Commenting on Matthew 2: 6 where a verse from Micah is quoted in part, Calvin says that unlike the scribes who like to quote in full, Matthew "nevertheless accommodates it in a fitting and proper way to suit his own purpose." The implication from this is that Calvin believes that there is nothing wrong with accommodating or indigenizing the message of the gospel so long as this accommodation may serve "to lead people to the fountain of God's Word." 88

The fourth gospel is a good example here of how the Gospel is accommodated with the purpose of leading people to its fountain. When John's gospel first appeared in the first two decades of the second century, it did not get as warm a

reception as the other gospels did from the Early Church. For a good half century, it was studiously ignored due to the amount of suspicion and antagonism it aroused. Why it was treated suspect is because its articulation of the Gospel appeared to be an alien intrusion into the authentic apostolic tradition. Because John "seems to be using the traditional language of the apostolic tradition and yet failing to maintain its content." In his explication of the Christian faith, John uses a series of expressions which embody the most sweeping and immediate claims possible. Jesus, in this Gospel, is constantly talking about light and darkness, life and death. He is the One who comes "from above" as contrasted with what is "from below" or "of the flesh." Further, John introduces such loaded words as 'logos,' 'soter,' 'pneuma,' 'light,' which carry with them an abundance of pre-Christian associations. And he uses these Greek concepts to express his understanding of the person of Jesus. It is this terminology of John which must have bothered his readers the most. At first sight it may seem that John is really presenting a different message, another Gospel. However, according to Visser t'Hooft, a careful reading of the gospel will show that John set all the borrowed concepts so firmly in the context of the total story of revelation and he fills them so resolutely with a new content that the reader must discover

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90 ibid., p. 50.
that he does not change the substance of the message, but only bring it home in a way which will make it more intelligible in the new environment.  

A similar conclusion is reached by Professor Nichol in his discussion of the meaning of Jesus in the fourth gospel. He writes:

He [John] used the language of an alien milieu to express in a new way the content of the Gospel; but he used it to such effect that it became the most powerful single expression in the whole of the New Testament of what the Christian life is all about. And in so doing he showed how the Christian message can renew its expression without losing its content."  

So what we can conclude from the way John used Greek concepts is this: accommodation is a necessary part of the theological task of expressing the substance of the gospel message. Visser 't Hooft has made this point when he declares "the first thing to be said about accommodation is that it is inescapable." He argues that no one can present the gospel without consciously or unconsciously seeking to express it in terms which are intelligible to his hearers and which are therefore not simply identical with the form in which the gospel was first formulated.  

The problem of language used to proclaim the faith shows that all proclamation is translation and all translation is accommodation. The bible translator sets the stage but the pastor on Sunday has to reinterpret the bible again for his own congregation. Every such interpreter thus consciously or unconsciously adapts the biblical material one

91 W. A. Visser't Hooft, op. cit., p. 10.
92 Frank Nichol, op. cit., p. 55.
93 W. A. Visser't Hooft, op. cit., p. 7.
way or another. And "to that extent every church has its indigenous theology, whether it is aware of the fact or not." ⁹⁴

Visser 't Hooft goes on to note an inevitable tension between the original biblical language and the language we use today. He claims that the right tension is there "where our language serves the core" of the biblical kerygma. Therefore one must learn to interpret not merely words and verses of the Scriptures, but the "inner structure of the whole biblical message."

Accommodation takes place as the Christian message enters into a new cultural environment. Accommodation also takes place as the message has to be presented to new generations. But while the language in which we express the faith must constantly be reformed, the content of the message must always remain the measuring rod or criterion. This is precisely what John and Paul did in their proclamation.

Thus in the Johannine and Pauline writings we receive the most impressive and effective lesson in accommodation that we can receive anywhere in church-history. ... they set all the borrowed concepts so firmly in the context of the total story of revelation and that they fill them so resolutely with a new content that the careful reader must discover that they do not change the substance of the message, but only bring it home in a way which will make it more intelligible in the new environment." ⁹⁵

According to Visser 't Hooft, the following four criteria are important in judging between good and bad accommodation: (1) Does this new presentation of the gospel interpret it in the

⁹⁴ ibid., p. 8.
⁹⁵ ibid., p. 10.
light of the Bible as a whole? (2) Does the new presentation "tell the great deeds of God"? (3) Does the message in its new form make clear that the gospel is concerned with the personal encounter with the living God and with the formation of a community based on that encounter? (4) Does the message in its new form fill the local or national cultural or religious concepts with biblical substance and so revolutionize them?

E. Summary.

We began this chapter with a discussion of the challenge posed for indigenous theology by the adoption and increasing popularity of the newer concept of contextualization. The rejection of indigenization by theologians and missiologists means, in effect, rejection of indigenous theology as an appropriate and valid way of doing theology. Yet, the various reasons given for rejecting indigenization are, to my mind, not at all convincing. Without having to counter every argument given in support for wishing to discard indigenization in their own terms, we have pointed to the fact that there are others who wish to retain the term indigenization for various reason. Thus, we have thought it sufficient to argue that the fundamental reason for arguing against indigenization (as represented by Shoki Coe) rests on a misconstrued, narrow view of culture. That is, a view which sees culture in temporal terms rather than holistically. Moreover, both contextualization and indigenization lack any precise definitions. The fact that there is a only a blurry
distinction between the two immediately discounts the suggestion that contextualization is a deeper concept than indigenization ever does. If, therefore, no adequate ground is found for discarding indigenization, then an indigenous theology is still a viable undertaking.

Indigenizing theology is a missiological necessity, borne out of the Church's attempt to indigenize Christianity in the mission field. As to whether this particular way of doing theology has any biblical or theological basis, we have seen that precedents for indigenizing theology are found in the way the New Testament writers sought to express the Christian faith as they had received it from the apostles.

In the history of Christian Church also, Christians have, in an effort to articulate the content of the faith, sought to do so in categories of thought and tools that were familiar and relevant to their own time and space. Thus Calvin's attempt to express the meaning of divine revelation utilized the concept of accommodation in view of the prevailing tendency of his time towards an understanding of God based on natural law and reason.

The doctrine of Incarnation provides a theological basis for indigenous theology. The incarnation of the Eternal Logos serves as the model of communicating divine truth. God in Christ came into a concrete historical situation. In the same manner, theology needs to be translated (incarnated) within a specific cultural milieu in order to be of any use to the Church and the world which it seeks to serve. Indigenous theology therefore is a mode of reflection on the Christian
gospel which seeks to serve the needs of the faith community by articulating the substance of the faith in language and ways that people can understand and accept, and by which the integration of Christian truth and the facilitation of human transformation—individually and corporately—may be aided. Such a method must take into serious consideration the "historicity" of those to whom the message is directed. It must be sensitive to the problems and issues that are most important at the present moment. Indigenous theology tries to make sense of the gospel message from the historical perspective of the local culture. At the same time, it tries to bring the local culture under the judgement of the gospel.

The content of the faith that is sought to be communicated is centred on the Love of God in Christ. God incarnate has assumed humanity in Jesus Christ because God loves human beings. Since this is the heart of the Good News that is to be communicated, indigenous theology seeks not just to communicate a concept of God in cultural categories of thought, it rather tries to make the good news about God's love for all heard in the local tongue. Indigenous theology is an attempt to create a new language with well-tensed modes of witness for the communication of this divine love. It does not necessarily have to be verbal language. It could be in the form of action or active service, similar to what Mother Theresa or Father Damien did in India and Molokai Island respectively. Or, it could be a life of obedience and responsible existence.
A. Problems Of Indigenous Theology.

At several points in the preceding chapters it was stressed that the divine-human encounter never occurs in a cultural vacuum. Hence the message of the Gospel has to take on the forms of a receiving culture in order for it to be understood and appropriated. It has to be expressed in the idiom of the language and culture of the receivers if the heart of the message is to be communicated across cultural barriers. But, given the 'supracultural' nature of the Gospel message, the fundamental problem for indigenous theology therefore would be how the supracultural may be communicated in culturally relevant and meaningful terms without being distorted or diluted by the non-Christian elements in a culture.

Determining the proper relationship between the supracultural and the cultural is no simple matter. For Professor Linwood Barney, this relationship raises the "most crucial" question for mission. "Can the supracultural find

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1. Christian belief in the supra-culture is a step of faith which affirms another dimension of reality which cannot be totally known or explained by empirical methods of analysis. It is rooted in the reality of the spiritual realm of God and His kingdom which is an accepted assumption of the biblical writers. Bruce Nicholls states, "When we speak of the supra-cultural, we mean the phenomena of cultural belief and behaviour that have their source outside of human culture." See, Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1979), p. 13.
adequate and meaningful forms of expression in any culture?"  

The answer being in the affirmative, Barney goes on to suggest that a third category be used in addition to the two other categories usually used with regard to the cross-cultural communication of the Gospel.

While some scholars simply distinguish the supracultural as absolute and the cultural as relative, Barney adds the term "constant" as a middle category between the supracultural absolutes and the cultural relativities. He writes:

"God is absolute, underived and unchanging. But consider the following implications. The Gospel is given of God. Therefore it is derived. It cannot be absolute. Is it therefore relative? If so, it is changeable. Yet Paul (Gal. 1: 6-9) speaks of the one Gospel.  

It is at this point that Barney feels that the additional concept of "constancy" would be helpful. Constant refers to that which, by nature, does not change though it may be derived. God is absolute but "that which he initiates and affirms to man in his covenant and redeeming acts is constant ..." It is in this sense that the Gospel is constant and unchanging; however, "the forms in which man responds to God, expresses Faith, and lives out his relationship with God are tied to his culture and therefore are relative." In expressing the supracultural therefore, both the integrity of

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3 ibid.,

4 ibid.,

5 ibid.,
a culture and the Gospel’s basic content have to be maintained. In other words, an indigenous expression of the Gospel message can preserve the integrity of a culture but in no way needs to compromise the essence and nature of the supernatural.

In what follows, attention will be focused on some of the problems associated with the attempt to do indigenous theology. Two basic problems shall be dealt with. The first is that of distortion and dilution of the Gospel, commonly referred to as syncretism. A second problem has to do with the danger of allowing the context to determine the content of the Gospel. It is hoped that through an examination of these problems as well as our understanding of the subject gained through previous discussions of other pertinent issues, we might be able to make some proposals as to what criteria may be deemed appropriate for evaluating an indigenous theology.

1. Syncretism.

Syncretism is as old as Christianity itself but, only in recent years has it become recognized as one of the major problems involved in the indigenization of the Christian gospel. As early as the history of Israel syncretism has, in various forms, shown itself to be a grave challenge. Yet, in Visser ’t Hooft’s observation, the gravity of the problem has not been felt by Christians to be a matter of serious concern. "One thing is certain," he writes in his study of the subject
- No Other Name - "the Christian Church has not taken the challenge of world-wide syncretism sufficiently seriously."⁶

It was at the Tambaram conference of the International Missionary Committee, in 1938, that the issue was given unprecedented prominence through Hendrik Kraemer's "theology of religions"⁷ specially. Ever since then, syncretism has been considered a universal danger and threat to the authenticity of the Christian faith and life. Since the term arises within the context of the cross-cultural communication of the gospel, the contemporary concern to indigenize the gospel in particular cultures has raised the issue in a new way. It is discussed at every study conference that covers the theme of the gospel and culture.⁸

At the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne (1974), the Study Group on "The Gospel, Contextualization and Syncretism" states that syncretism is said to occur "when critical and basic elements of the Gospel are lost in the process of indigenization and are replaced by

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⁷ Christian "theology of religions" has been defined by Alan Race as, "the attempt on the part of Christian theologians to account theologically for the diversity of the world's religious quest and commitment, a diversity which shows all the signs of continuing to exist, in spite of the Christian missions." Alan Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian theology of religions, (London: SCM, 1983), p. 2.

⁸ Bruce Nicholls, ibid., p. 29.
religious elements from the receiving culture."\(^9\) The Willowbank Report of the Consultation on Gospel and Culture, Bermuda, in 1978, has this to say:

As the church seeks to express its life in local cultural forms, it soon has to face the problem of cultural elements that either are evil or have evil associations. How should the church react to these? Elements which are intrinsically false or evil clearly cannot be assimilated into Christianity without a lapse into syncretism. This is a danger for all churches in all cultures.\(^10\)

Implicit in these statements is a warning against syncretism. Whilst there is a need for bold and creative attempts to utilize cultural forms that can be baptized into Christ, the dangers of compromise, dilution and distortion of the Christian faith are always present. One does well to try and avoid these.

Our concern with indigenous theology gives rise to a number of questions regarding the nature of syncretism and its implications for the task of indigenizing the Christian message. What is syncretism, and how is it a danger to Christianity? Given the negative connotation surrounding the word, is it possible for the term to be understood otherwise, that is, in a positive light? Is not syncretism an inevitable outcome of a genuine attempt to express the christian message in the context of cultures that are informed by 'other'


religious traditions? If syncretism is a totally negative thing, how do we justify the attempts of the Early Church to indigenize the gospel using elements of the Hellenistic cultures? These questions will be kept in mind as we try to clarify the problem of syncretism.

(a) What is Syncretism?

The word has been used in a variety of ways. Some speak of syncretism whenever a particular religion makes use of concepts which have their origin in the life of another religion. Others speak of syncretism when a particular religion goes further than translation\(^\text{11}\) and takes into its own life ideas or practices which have their origin in another religious world.

Both these usages are obviously too general to warrant any kind of consensus. For, in the case of the former usage, one can very well conclude that every religion is syncretistic since it is impossible to enter into communication with people who live in another environment without using expressions and concepts which are in some way related to and embedded in the religious world in which the people concerned are living. In the case of the latter, it is hardly an arbitrary matter to say that every world religion has, to some extent, absorbed

\(^{11}\text{Translation is not syncretism, it is done with the desire to pass on the original message as clearly as possible and without greater modification to the content of the message being translated.}\)
and assimilated foreign ideas into its life and practice.\textsuperscript{12}

For want of a more adequate formulation, Visser 't Hooft reserves the term "syncretism" for a "religious attitude" which holds that: (i) there is no unique revelation in history, (ii) there are many ways to reach divine reality, (iii) all formulations of religious truth or experience are inadequate expressions of that truth and, (iv) it is necessary to harmonize as much as possible all religious ideas and experiences so as to create one universal religion for humankind.\textsuperscript{13}

In the light of this, syncretism can be taken to mean an uncritical and simplistic harmonization of diverse religious elements from different sources in order to form a concerted religious whole. It is the amalgamation of different religious truths in the hope of creating a universal faith. Thus, Bruce Nicholls defines syncretism as the "attempt to reconcile diverse or conflicting beliefs or religious practices into a unified system."\textsuperscript{14} Elwood adds that it is the result of

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Hinduism, in its Gandhian strand is said to have been considerably influenced by Christian and Muslim teachings. Gandhi's adaptation of the Hindu doctrine of 'ahimsa' (which he translated as non-violence) as an important part of his religious and political philosophy, derived much inspiration from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. See, R. C. Zaehner, Hinduism, (London: O.U.P. 1980), Chapter 8; Katherine Savage, The Story of World Religions, (New York: Henry Z. Walck, 1966), Chapter 4. Many of Buddhist doctrines have been ideas taken over from Hinduism and transformed by various schools of Buddhism. Christianity too has absorbed and utilized ideas taken from Greek philosophy and Hellenistic culture. Refer, Robert J. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, (London: SCM, 1985), p. 151.

\textsuperscript{13} W. A. Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 11.

\textsuperscript{14} Bruce J. Nicholls, loc. cit.,
contrary beliefs being held side by side "without reinterpretation."\textsuperscript{15}

Hendrik Kraemer has put the matter quite precisely when he describes syncretism as "a systematic attempt to combine, blend and reconcile inharmonious, even often conflicting elements in a so-called synthesis."\textsuperscript{16} What is clear is that syncretism involves the intention to blend and harmonize conflicting religious elements into what may amount to a universal religion. And from the point of view of biblical faith, this is dangerous because it leads to compromising the essence of the Christian faith.

(b) Essence of Syncretism.

According to Visser 't Hooft, recognition of the dangers of syncretism calls for a serious attempt on the part of the Christian Church to deal urgently with the problem. This means: (1) knowing what syncretism is, (2) giving a clear, theologically sound and pastorally relevant refutation of its errors, and (3) showing that its concern for a truly universal faith is the concern of the Christian Church itself.\textsuperscript{17}

In surveying the various "waves of syncretism" in history, both ancient and modern, Visser 't Hooft finds that


\textsuperscript{17} W. A. Visser 't Hooft, op. cit., p. 49.
in nearly all cases, the same basic motifs are found. To a large extent, the many syncretisms have a common structure. The basic attitude is that there are many ways to God and that God is too great, too unknowable to reveal Godself in a single revelation and once for all. All this leads him to the conclusion that syncretism is essentially "a revolt against the uniqueness of revelation in history." 

Syncretism claims that true universality can only be gained if the pretension that God has actually made himself definitely known in a particular person and event at a particular time is given up. So in addition to the blending and amalgamation of conflicting religious elements, the denial of revelation constitutes the gravest danger of syncretism for the christian faith. For, the heart of the christian gospel is the redemptive love of God revealed in and through the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Take that revelation away and the foundation of Christianity disintegrates.

It is the recognition of this essential challenge of syncretism which made it a major issue at the Tambaram Conference. In the study book prepared for that conference - The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World - Hendrik Kraemer argues that the amalgamation of religious elements without reference to the criterion of revelation is a theologically illegitimate venture. Syncretism, says he, "is

18 ibid., p. 48.
19 ibid., p. 85.
the illegitimate mingling of different religious elements" over against "adaptation" which he takes to be a legitimate effort to "translate," "interpret" and "incarnate" Christianity against the background of other religions. In other words, in any effort to adapt the Christian message in the context of other religions, the criterion of revelation serves as "the measuring-rod" for judging between illegitimate adaptation (syncretism) and legitimate adaptation (indigenization).

Kraemer further points out that the history of the "adaptation" of Christianity after the New Testament period is generally mixed with a good deal of syncretism. While the incarnation of Christianity is legitimate, in many respects it would be easy to write a vigorous criticism of the many incarnations because they often represent "more a diminishing and suppression of the true character of the religion of revelation by the alien forms and instruments than an expression of it." The religious and philosophical foreign

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21 Basic to Kraemer's missionary approach to the meeting and interaction between religious traditions in the world, is the principle of "Evangelistic Adaptation." He states, "To decide for Christ and the world He stands for implies a break with one's religious past." But this does not mean that Christians ought to despise that past. Rather it involves that the Christian truth must be "expressed against the background of, and in conflict with, the moral and religious context of the non-Christian religions." ibid., p. 308.


23 Hendrik Kraemer, op. cit., p. 312.
tongues which have been used in the past by the Christian Churches have served as much to distort and falsify the revelation in Christ as to express it. He writes:

The whole history of Christian dogma is, so to speak, the story of the perennial tension and war between the mysterious wisdom of God in the acts of Revelation and the various foreign tongues.24 Syncretism universally remains a constant danger to Christian authenticity.

(c) Fear of Syncretism.

Since Tambaram, the threat of syncretism has been, on the one hand, well accepted by those involved in the communication of the Christian Gospel in other cultural contexts. On the other, it has proved to be a stumbling block in efforts to formulate an indigenous Christian theology. Douglas Elwood has pointed out that it was "on the rocks of syncretism" in vogue during the 1920s and 1930s that early attempts at contextualizing Christian faith and life in Asia, especially in India, foundered.25 What this suggests is that among Asian Christians, syncretism has, in no small way, contributed to retarding the progress of authentic indigenization. The fact that some Asian Church leaders at the Bangkok Assembly of the East Asian Christian Conference, in 1950, expressed suspicion of all attempts to express the Christian gospel in the thought-forms of Asian cultures is an indication of this.

24 ibid., p. 327.
This apparent reluctance to attempt an indigenous expression of the Christian message is reflected in Winburn Thomas' comment regarding the state of theological education in S. E. Asia around the mid-fifties. "Thus far, most of the theological contributions of Asian Christian scholars have been mere rewrites of Western theology." 26 To the extent that this was true in the 1950s, Elwood finds the motive for this partly in the "fear of syncretism." 27 So it happens that after Tambaram, where 'westerners' had severely warned against syncretism, a lack of theological creativity came to characterize the mood of Asian Christian reflection on the gospel. Evidently, this lack of theological initiative only produced negative consequences. M. M. Thomas observes that one of the unfortunate results of this fear of syncretism is a tendency to absolutize the Christian religion over against other religions. Such a tendency toward "absolutization of Western Christianity" has only the negative effect of leading to still further self-isolation of Christian Churches from those of other faiths in whose midst they lived. 28 It also prevents the needed dialogue between Christians and people of other religions. For these reasons, Thomas criticizes Kraemer


for over-emphasizing the danger of syncretism and inciting a fear of it. For, such fear can only serve as a hindrance to the process of indigenization in the context of Asia. Indeed, while he (Kraemer) succeeded in stopping the illegitimate mingling of heterogeneous religious elements, at the same time, he also succeeded in stopping the legitimate interpenetration necessary for the "adaptation" of the gospel which he strongly advocated.29

Obviously, the impact of Tambaram on Christian missions and Churches was exactly the opposite of what Kraemer intended. The leaders of missions and churches were so afraid of the danger of syncretism that all inter-religious contact was virtually banned. Any effort at indigenization of Christianity was dismissed as being syncretistic without really examining it. Much of the creative and theological initiative of Asian Christians was stifled unnecessarily.30 Their willingness to experiment with ways of incarnating the gospel was unduly diminished by an excessive fear of syncretism. Hence, while the dangers of syncretism were well recognized to constitute a great threat to the integrity of the Christian gospel, the fear of syncretism itself became equally problematic for the task of indigenous theology. Thus Bruce Nicholls rightly warns that an "unhealthy phobia of syncretism can cripple true indigenization and


30 ibid.,
contextualization."^{31}

(d) From an illegitimate to a legitimate Syncretism.

During the post-war period of national independence and nation-building, Asian Christians began to feel that the Asian churches ought to emphasize the positive potentialities of the "inter-religious traffic" rather than the danger of syncretism.^{32} This was felt to be necessary in view of the Asian reality of cultural and religious pluralism as well as the growing concern for dialogue with people of other faiths. The felt need of Christian mission was to develop a proper sense of direction for the inescapable interaction with other religions, ideologies and cultures.

Thus, at the Kandy Consultation in 1965, it was frankly acknowledged that Christian faith and experience can be illuminated and enriched through insights from Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic religions. How is this possible? The statement of that consultation reads,

> This enrichment happens ... when as Christians we re-interpret, to express our own obedience to Christ, the Asian concern for asceticism and renunciation, its wrestling with the meaning of suffering, and its deep mystical experience.^{33}

Here, syncretism begins to be seen in a slightly more positive way than it has been regarded earlier. Syncretism is seen to

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^{31} Bruce Nicholls, op. cit., p. 29.


happen only when contrasting beliefs are held together without critical interpretation. "In the past," the statement goes on to say, "we have been too inhibited by our fear of syncretism" to enable us to interpret Christian faith in the context of Asian cultures and religions, and of the contemporary Asian revolution. But a living theology must speak to the questions Asians are asking. It must also speak in relation to the answers that are being given by Asian religions and philosophies, both in their classical forms and in new forms created by the impact on them of Western thought, secularism, and science.

The collective voice of Asia was heard loud and clear at the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1975) especially during the debate over the "Seeking Community" report. Elwood cites the Christian Conference of Asia News as saying, "Asian voices challenged the negative and largely unfounded fears of some Europeans that syncretism will be entertained in the concern for dialogue with people of other faiths." Rev. Kenneth Fernando of Sri Lanka argued that "exclusivism" was a far greater danger for most Asian Christians than "syncretism." Wesley Ariarajah, a fellow Sri Lankan, rendered support by arguing that Christianity is itself a syncretistic religion, at least in its theological formulations, symbols, and practices. Hence to say that

34 ibid.,

35 ibid., p. 44.

36 CCA News (December 1975). Quoted by Douglas Elwood in "Emerging Themes In Asian Theological Thinking," p. 239.
"seeking community with people of other faiths will entertain syncretistic tendencies is sheer nonsense." 37

Decades before Nairobi, Russell Chandran had made the same argument, saying that every Christian theology contains some syncretism. Western theology, as a case in point, is syncretistic "in so far as it arose always and everywhere in a specific framework." 38 So what seems to concern Asians is not so much the fear of what might happen in the process of indigenizing the Christian message but that the actual task of indigenization in view of the life-realities of the Asian situation might not be attempted at all.

At the Nairobi Assembly, many Asians bemoaned the fact that those who deny the reality that Christ can be experienced through the living process of dialogue are usually Christians who have not actually experienced living with people of other faiths! M. M. Thomas points out that most Asians live in situations of pluralism. And they know only too well in their living experience that they live with elements of culture, philosophy, and cult drawn from different religious and secular ideological traditions. "There is no other way of living." 39 In other words, syncretism, in the sense of the unintegrated mixtures of religious, ideological and cultural elements, is an inevitable concomitant of the adaptation and the incarnation of Christianity in history. This is particularly so in view of 'disintegration' and

37 ibid.

38 Cited by Visser 't Hooft, No Other Name, p. 123.

'reintegration'; the "reciprocal interactions of all kinds" which have appeared as a result of the impact of modernity on contemporary religions and cultures.\footnote{ibid.}

For Thomas, the emphasis in the discussion of syncretism ought to be put not so much on the 'dangers' of it (which he does not deny), as to what it means to be a Christian in such a context. That is, the meaning of one's decision for Christ. Naturally, this decision would necessitate a continuous effort to integrate and adapt these elements in some coherent form in order for the gospel to become a living reality against the background of other religious traditions. He claims that syncretism is not an 'illegitimate mingling of religious elements' as Kraemer thinks. Rather syncretism, Thomas argues,

\begin{quote}
\textit{is legitimate for the Christian and the Church so long as it is not a goal in itself but indicates a process towards a new integration or adaptation based on Christian fundamentals.}\footnote{ibid.}
\end{quote}

That is to say, in so far as syncretism is not seen as an end in itself but as part of the process of indigenizing the Gospel through integrating elements of the local context in accordance with Christian truth, it is legitimate. Such a process would obviously be so if it is judged by Christ himself, the centre of the gospel. This is what he means by a "Christ-centred syncretism."

Basically, M. M. Thomas wants to rescue the word syncretism from its bad connotation. And he does this by

\footnote{ibid.}
\footnote{ibid.}
redefining it not as an illegitimate mingling of religious elements, but more neutrally as "any interpenetration between religions and between cultures" and then to distinguish between a wrong and right kind of syncretism.\footnote{ibid., p. 16.} The Christian goal in this activity would be "a Christ-centred syncretism."

In this redefinition, it is clear that Thomas represents a position which accepts the substance of the main emphasis of Kraemer but seeks to go beyond it by legitimatizing syncretism and turning it into a positive concept. To support his claim, he draws on the history of the word highlighting the fact that in European Protestant theological circles in the 19th and 20th centuries, the word was used to denote what Kraemer calls "adaptation," that is, assimilation by one religion of foreign religious elements without losing its fundamental character.\footnote{ibid., p. 17.} He also notes that Visser 't Hooft, who stands very much by Kraemer's own definition of syncretism, admits that theologians like Harnack and Bultmann have used the word in this positive way.\footnote{See Visser 't Hooft, "Accommodation - True and False," p. 12.}

More recently Pannenberg has, in the light of criticisms against the claim about the syncretistic character of Christianity, affirmed that the assimilation by early Christianity of Hellenistic materials was done on the basis of faith in the universality of "the Logos incarnate in Jesus" and that it could properly be called syncretism because of the
reciprocity and interaction involved. He adds: "The fact that Christianity is syncretistic to an unusual degree thus expresses not a weakness but the unique strength of Christianity."\(^45\) That Pannenberg affirms a positive element in the meaning of syncretism is quite clear from this statement.

The impulsion of Thomas to salvage the word syncretism comes from his concern about the continuing hindrance to inter-faith dialogue which the negative connotation of the word syncretism effects. So his approach has the goal of enabling Christians to be open to interpenetration of cultural and religious levels, but with Jesus Christ as the principle of discrimination and coherence. By redefining syncretism in terms of Christ as the centre of the Gospel "for human beings," Asian Christians are freed from their inhibition about indigenizing the christian message. They are allowed to mutually participate with people of other religions in the building of new human societies. With Christ as the criterion for distinguishing between right and wrong syncretism, it is possible for Asian Christians to indigenize the gospel without losing its fundamental character.

(e) Summary.

That the danger of syncretism ought to be taken seriously if the true character of the Christian gospel is to be maintained is now accepted in theological circles. As we can see from the various ways the word has been used and defined, there are two main types of syncretistic dangers. Such dangers are always present whenever the attempt is made to indigenize the gospel in particular cultures. Bruce Nicholls refers to these as, "cultural syncretism" and "theological syncretism." 46

The former may result from an enthusiastic attempt to translate the Christian faith by uncritically using the symbols and religious practices of the receptor culture, resulting in a fusion of Christian and pagan beliefs and practices. This is evident in Latin America where the Roman Catholic Church, since the conquest by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, has accommodated native animistic and superstitious practices into their Catholic ritual. 47 Another form of cultural syncretism is the unconscious identification of biblical Christianity with a particular way of life such as the "American way." 48

The latter involves the joining together of concepts and images at the depths of world view and cosmology, and of moral and ethical values. It is the attempt to adapt or indigenize

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46 Bruce Nicholls, op. cit., pp. 30-34.
47 ibid., p. 30.
48 Refer pp. 214-217 below.
the gospel in a non-Christian culture at the risk of mixing the biblical revelation with categories of thought which transform that revelation into something else than it is.\textsuperscript{49}

An extreme example is cited by Dr. Bong Rin Ro from the theology of Dr. Sung Bum Yun who finds the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in the Korean myth of creation.\textsuperscript{50} If Dr. Ro has understood Dr. Yun correctly, it would seem that he is entirely justified in citing this as an example of syncretism in Asian Christian theology.\textsuperscript{51}

We have stressed two prominent lines of argument in the debate about the problem of syncretism. M. M. Thomas, like many Asian theologians, considers syncretism inevitable and argues that the term can be understood positively. A "Christ-centred syncretism" which he claims to be a "legitimate" process of converting and adapting non-religious elements and cultural values into the Christian faith, is a

\textsuperscript{49} Visser 't Hooft, \textit{No Other Name}, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{50} According to the myth, in the beginning there was a heavenly emperor, Hang-in who had a son called Hang-ung. The father gave his son three royal seals to rule the world. The son descended into the world near Teaback Mountain in the central part of Korea by a divine tree with 3,000 tribesmen to erect a divine city. He married a female bear who bore a son, called Tang-gun Wang-Kum. He is the one who built the first Korean dynasty, Tang-gun Chosen. The Supreme God, Hang-in; God's Son, Hang-ung; and the female bear, a terrestrial goddess, were united to produce a human being. Now Professor Yun concludes that the Tang-gun myth may be an indigenized form of the Christian doctrine of Trinity. See, Bong Rin Ro, "Contextualization: Asian Theology," in \textit{What Asian Christians Are Thinking}, ed., Douglas J. Elwood, (Quezon, Philippines: New Day, 1976), p. 54.

proposition intended to rescue the word syncretism from its negative connotation.\textsuperscript{52}

On the opposite pole of the debate, Visser 't Hooft argues that syncretism is not inevitable. He agrees with Chandran that every theology contains the danger of syncretism. Admittedly, Western theology has very often, in seeking to accommodate the Christian message to the Western cultural environment, distorted the substance of the gospel. "But," he says, "that does not mean that we must resign ourselves to the fact that syncretism is inevitable."\textsuperscript{53} A theology is not syncretistic if and when it uses the thought-forms of the environment in which it operates. But it is syncretistic if and when in using such thought-forms it introduces into its structure ideas which change the meaning of biblical truth in its substance.

The substance of the biblical truth is the affirmation of God's once-for-all revelation in Jesus Christ. This central affirmation must serve to distinguish between syncretistic accommodation of the Gospel and that which is not. Here, Visser 't Hooft cites John and Paul as exemplars of non-syncretistic indigenization. For him, "The only effective answer to syncretism" is therefore to be found in the "demonstration in word and deed" of this fundamental truth of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} M. M. Thomas, "Christ-Centred-Syncretism, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{53} Visser 't Hooft, ibid., p. 123.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid., p. 125.
At first glance, these two arguments may appear to be contradictory. Yet, a closer examination has given the impression that this is not so since the one does not invalidate the other as the case would normally be with contradictory statements. As a matter of fact, both arguments are based on a christological affirmation of the fundamental truth of the Christian faith, namely that Jesus Christ is the concrete revelation of God's redeeming love for the world. The premise is the same in both cases. The difference however, lies in the theological perspective used for interpreting the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Hendrik Kraemer and Visser 't Hooft take God's Word as found in the bible as the departure point for theological reflection. Hence they represent a position which underlines the centrality of God's action in Jesus Christ in judgement and in the redemption of the world. For them, the Gospel is "from God." God has acted for humanity's salvation once-for-all in human history only through the incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. The emphasis in both is on the uniqueness and finality of Christ, and hence of Christianity. Logically, the conclusion of this understanding of revelation is that all other religious efforts to attain salvation are futile and hopeless. Other religions and their adherents are therefore seen to be excluded from the economy of God's redemptive activity in the world.

M. M. Thomas' entry into the realm of theology is through politics and the concern for political and social justice. For him, the Gospel remains centred on Jesus Christ, the God-man.
But he emphasizes the social dimension of the Gospel. His understanding of the Gospel is from a Christian anthropological perspective. He does not deny that the Gospel is derived from God. But he wishes to affirm the other side of the medal, namely, the gospel is "for humanity." Theology, therefore, cannot be divorced from anthropology.

Thomas' reflection on the faith is based on a "Christ-centred Humanism" which for him, is "integral to the Gospel and has its own evangelistic dimension." Jesus is understood as a human being in whom and through whom God was working in a decisive way for the redemption of humanity. Christ is the symbol of God's identification with humanity through the man Jesus. Thus, if the attempt to express the gospel in cultural forms is done from this Christ-centred humanistic perspective, then, the integration of non-Christian elements into the Christian message (syncretism) cannot be seen to be a totally negative thing.

The point I have tried to make is this: On syncretism, the seemingly contradictory viewpoints represented by Visser 't Hooft on one side and M. M. Thomas on the other, are not really contradictory. Rather, they seem to run parallel. Both 't Hooft and Thomas agree on the dangers of syncretism with regard to the attempt to indigenize the Christian message. On the question of whether or not syncretism is inevitable, they diverge. They also perceive syncretism differently; one sees it negatively, the other positively. But the points of divergence have, it seems to me, less to do with the actual

55 M. M. Thomas, ibid., p. 13.
substance of the gospel than the starting points of their theological reflection.

Often if not always, it seems to me, where one begins will determine where one will end and how one will get there. Since Visser 't Hooft begins his theology from a christological apprehension of God's salvific act revealed once-for-all in Jesus as the Bible proclaims it, logically, the ensuing exclusion of all other religions necessarily means that all forms of syncretism are uncritically judged to be negative and unacceptable. Similarly, by beginning from a Christ-centred Humanism, M. M. Thomas is naturally led to the universal significance of the gospel and its implications for human community and inter-religious dialogue. This also compels him to view other religions and subsequently, syncretism positively.

Personally, I believe both lines of argument contain valuable points that ought to be borne in mind in any attempt to resolve the problem of syncretism. There is no doubt that syncretism poses a challenge to the integrity of the Christian faith. There is no doubt also that, given the missionary mandate to adapt Christian thought to a given milieu, (a mandate rooted in the incarnation of the Word in history), some degree of syncretism is inevitable.\(^5\) That is to say, syncretism is to a considerable extent, a concomitant of the

\(^5\) The point has been made elsewhere that Christianity, in its expression and life inevitably is conditioned by its environment. It is claimed that "the very process of translation and interpretation is a compromise with the culture and life to which the Christian witness is made." See, Winburn T. Thomas, "Teaching Theology in Asia," Theology Today, Vol. 13, no. 2 (July 1956), p. 201.
indigenization process. For these reasons, the threat of syncretism must never be taken lightly; but neither should it prevent efforts to express the gospel indigenously. Moreover, syncretism must not be viewed too pragmatically. While the danger of syncretism is well accepted, it cannot be regarded as a once and for all settled matter since no consensus has been achieved as to what syncretism precisely means.

Understanding of the subject is still in a crude state. The phenomenon of syncretism, says Schreiter, "is amorphous and subject in its interpretation to the judgement and temperament of the investigator." If this is so, then it would seem best to conclude with M. M. Thomas that, since all Christians are pagans in parts, a synthesis of Christianity and cultures is a long way away. And all we can now realize is "syncretism with a sense of Christian direction." That is to say, the perfect integration of Christ and culture is something to be realized in the future. Integration into Christ remains eschatological. The only thing we can emphasize now is that the conscious decision be Christ-centred and that the process of conversion be taken seriously. Efforts at indigenizing the Christian faith must be judged and evaluated in the light of the centre - Jesus Christ.


Closely linked with syncretism yet somewhat distinctive is a second problem involved in adapting the supracultural Gospel to a cultural setting. This is the danger of allowing the cultural context to determine the substance of the Gospel. Rather than the gospel taking a pre-eminent role in the indigenization process, the cultural context is given a more authoritative position. Context becomes elevated to a higher level of importance so that the Gospel becomes secondary. The analogy of cart-before-the-horse is a fitting description of this situation. Bultmann’s program of demythologizing the New Testament to suit the anti-supernaturalistic mood of his time is a case in point. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that in the light of Shepherd’s categorization of syncretism, Bultmann’s demythologization falls into what is called "syncretism by accommodation."\(^{59}\)

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\(^{59}\) Shepherd classifies syncretism under three categories, depending on how basic Christian truth is related to culture. (1) Assimilative syncretism incorporates elements of non-Christian religions based on the claim that there is no qualitative difference between the Christian and other religions. (2) Syncretism by accommodation reduces or rephrases the Gospel’s content by applying a naturalistic world-view in the interpretation of the Christian faith. (3) Syncretism through accretion occurs when secondary beliefs and practices obscure the essential message. Jack F. Shepherd, "Mission — and Syncretism," in The Church’s Worldwide Mission, ed., Harold Lindsell (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1966), pp. 85-95.
Bultmann claims that the New Testament was written according to the prevailing worldviews based largely on Jewish and pagan mythology. Thus the kerygma is expressed in mythological language. Bultmann also claims that because the universe is a closed system where only natural, cause-effect relations occur, miracles are an impossibility. Following Barth's distinction between Geschichte (super history where God works) and Historie (ordinary history), Bultmann denies, contra Barth, that the former occurs in the latter. Thus even if Christ's death and resurrection did happen, their significance do not lie in their being objective historical events but in their being "images" or "myths" which confront the person of faith. Christ's death and resurrection as events signify nothing for our salvation. Salvation is not anchored upon a unique act (the cross) but it is an event which is repeated anew in each individual whenever the news of Christ's death addresses him/her. As Cullmann has put it, when Christ died on the cross, "nothing happened ontologically

60 Myth, as defined by Bultmann is the "imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side." Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in Kerygma and Myth, ed., H. W. Bartsch (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 10.


62 ibid., p. 238.
for the salvation of humanity." When the early Christians speak of a redemptive death, of an effect produced outside ourselves, we meet a "myth."

It must be said that reconciliation between God and humanity was effected through the event of the cross (considered "foolishness" by the Greeks) not through an "image" of it. Granted that through the "event of preaching" the kerygma, the Christ-event confronts me here and now, its significance is still linked to a spatio-temporal event. While Heilsgeschichte (salvation history) does not coincide with Historie (since it is interpreted history), nevertheless, it occurred in ordinary history. It is to be recognized in this connection that it will be necessary from time to time to remythologize the kerygma if only to make it intelligible to a particular audience. It is imperative however, that in doing so, the kerygma not be emptied of its basic content, namely, Christ's death and resurrection as objective events.

(b) Secular Christianity.

The concept of "secular Christianity" provides another example of indigenous theological reflection on the gospel where context takes precedence over the substance of the gospel. One of the essential elements of biblical christology is the universal or "cosmic" dimension of the Gospel concerning God's redemptive purpose in Christ. This universal

dimension is summed up in the creed of the Church which affirms that "Jesus is the Kyrios." But this affirmation of Christ's lordship demands of the Christian believer a discipleship that involves a paradox of great importance. The Bible itself presents the Christian person with the demand both to be "in" the world and not to be "of" the world. (John 17: 11; 15-16). While the Christian lives out the Christian vocation in the world, in no way must (s) he allow worldly values to determine his/her understanding and practice of the faith. This means that in the context of Christian mission, an uncritical identification of the Gospel message with the values of the "world" ought to be avoided if the essentials of the Gospel are to be maintained.

Speaking from the perspective of evangelism, Rene Padilla asserts that "secular Christianity" clearly reflects this "worldliness" in the life and mission of church today. For him, secular Christianity is a case of adaptation of the Gospel to the "spirit of the times." In the history of Christian theology, this is nothing new. Already in the first century an attempt was made to accommodate the Gospel to the dualism between spirit and matter that was part of the ideological atmosphere of the day. In the face of a dualistic interpretation of the world, a new Christology was proposed that would make the Gospel acceptable to those who could not conceive of the possibility that God (Good by nature) should enter into direct relation with matter (evil by nature). Thus

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there developed in the history of Christian thought what came to the known as Docetism.

Today, the problem is not the dualism between spirit and matter, but rather secularism - the concept that the natural world represents the totality of reality and therefore the only possible knowledge is the "scientific." It is the logical consequence of another type of dualism derived from the philosophy of Descartes - the dualism between the person (thinking subject) and the world (object of thought).65 There is no place for God as the transcendent being who has the power to act in history and in nature. All that exists or happens in the universe can be explained by the laws of cause and effect; what cannot be investigated by empirical methods cannot be real.

All the versions of "secular Christianity" advocated by modern theologians assume the validity of secularism. They all take as their starting point a world in which humanity has supposedly come of age and has no need for supernatural reality, the basic premise of religion. Their purpose is a re-statement of the Gospel for the modern person who has learned to get along in the world and now has no need of supernatural help. It is assumed that if the Christian faith

65 Rene Descartes' formula, "I think, therefore I am" failed to take into account that man is not a mind, but a mind/body (a psychosomatic being), living and acting in the world, and that the "subjective" and "objective" aspects of reality are therefore inseparable in knowledge. The failure resulted in the split of reality into two levels: the upper level of the "subjective" (feelings and religion) and the lower level of the "objective" (facts and science). This split is behind much of modern thinking in the fields of science, philosophy and theology.
is to survive, it must be brought up to date; it must throw off every residue of "transcendentalism" and express itself in secular terms, so that no thinking person has to reject it together with the accompanying pre-scientific ideas. 66

The foundation is thus laid for human beings to concentrate all their efforts in building the earthly city, without having to concern themselves with reality beyond or above the natural realm. One is the author of one's own destiny and one's vocation is exclusively historical.

Robert J. Blaikie 67 has demonstrated in detail that in the Cartesian system of reality that underlies "secular Christianity" there really is no place for the concept of human being as an "agent," capable of acting freely and introducing intentional changes in the world. Action is the basic characteristic of personal reality. But if the human is no more than the thinking subject and the world only the object of human thought, completely determined within a closed system of causes and effects, it follows that the human being is not a personal reality and cannot be considered an active agent. However, common sense tells us that we are in effect beings living and acting in the world and that the concept of reality as something that can only be known "objectively" by means of the scientific method, is an incomplete view of reality based on philosophical premises that, as such, cannot be proven scientifically. In conclusion "secular Christianity"

66 Rene Padilla, ibid., p. 124.

is not a mere "re-statement" of the Gospel, but rather a capitulation in favour of a distorted concept of reality that is part of modern secularism.

According to the biblical account, responsibility for creation is an essential aspect of the human vocation. Thus, the exclusion of God, as the personal God who acts in nature and in human history is a compromise with the "spirit of the age." It is a form of worldliness. "Secular Christianity" is a human-centred religion that says human beings hear only what they want to hear — that they are their own bosses, that the future is in their hands, that God can only be tolerated as something impersonal that they can manipulate. It is a denial of the biblical message whose basic presupposition is that God transcends the universe and acts freely within it.

In the final analysis, what "secular Christianity" does is to sanctify the secular, replacing God's love manifested in Jesus Christ by love for "the things" of the secular city, as if the present order, to which they belong, had absolute value.68

(c) Culture Christianity.

No less harmful to the cause of the Gospel than "secular Christianity" is the identification of Christianity with a culture or a cultural expression. We have, during the discussion of the problem of syncretism, alluded to the sixteenth-century conquest of Latin America in the name of the

68 Rene Padilla, ibid., p. 125.
Catholic king and queen of Spain. This conquest was not only military but religious as well. It was concerned with implanting not merely Spanish culture, but a "Christian culture." Only in recent years has Rome become aware that the Christianity of the people of Latin America is almost purely nominal. In the nineteenth century, the Christian missionary outreach was so closely connected with European colonialism that in Africa and Asia Christianity would become identified as a white person's religion.

Today, however, another form of 'culture Christianity' has emerged by way of the "American Way of Life" which, according to Rene Padilla, has come to dominate the world scene.\(^69\) In describing this phenomenon, Padilla quotes a North American Christian as stating:

> A major source of the rigid equation of socio-political conservatism with evangelism is conformity with the world. We have equated 'Americanism' with Christianity to such an extent that we are tempted to believe that people in other cultures must adopt American institutional patterns when they are converted. We are led through natural psychological processes to an unconscious belief that the essence of our American Way of Life is basically, if not entirely, Christian.\(^70\)

This equation in the United States insures the presence of a large number of middle class whites in the church. But the price the church has had to pay for quantity is to forfeit its prophetic role in society.

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\(^{69}\) ibid., p. 125. c.f. Bruce Nicholls, op. cit., p. 31.

Nicholls\textsuperscript{71} has hinted to this effect when he points out that many Christians both in the Western and Third World are unaware that their lifestyle has more affinity to the consumer principles of capitalist society than to the realities of the New Testament. The tendency to regard christian evangelism purely in terms of conversion and an enthusiasm for overseas mission only, such that non-involvement in the problems of race, poverty and oppression in the church's neighbourhood are deemed justifiable, strongly indicate that the prophetic voice of the Church is muffled. What Tillich called "the Protestant principle," that is, the capacity to denounce every historic absolutization, seems impossible for "culture Christianity."

In view of the powerful influence that this type of Christianity has had in the "mission field," Padilla claims that the Gospel that is preached today in the many countries of the world bears the marks of the "American Way of Life." A popular image of a Christian that has been projected by this form of Christianity is that of a "successful businessman" who has found the formula for happiness, a formula he wants to share with others freely. The problem is that, in a market of free consumers of religion in which the church has no possibility of maintaining its monopoly on religion, this Christianity has resorted to reducing its message to a minimum in order to make all people want to become Christians. The Gospel thus becomes a "type of merchandise," the acquisition of which guarantees to the consumer the highest values, namely, "success" and everlasting "happiness." Accepting

\textsuperscript{71} Bruce Nicholls, op. cit., p. 31.
Christ is therefore the means to reach the ideal of the good life, at no cost.\textsuperscript{72} Is this not a distortion of the content of the Gospel? Is it not a clear case of 'context' determining the 'content' of the Christian message?

Obviously, in this form of culture Christianity, the Cross has lost its offence, since it simply points to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us, but it is not a call to discipleship. The God of this type of Christianity is the God of "cheap grace," to use Bonhoeffer's phrase. God is one who constantly gives but never demands, the God fashioned expressly for mass-humanity, who is controlled by the law of least possible effort and seeks easy solutions; the God who gives attention to those who will not reject God because they need God as a kind of opiate or analgesic. Expressed in terms of Greek theatre, God in this form of Christianity is a "deus ex machina" - a mechanical God invoked only to solve human problems rather than a God who, by virtue of being transcendent and sovereign over all creation, cannot be domesticated or regarded as one's private possession. Christ as Lord and Saviour is not simply a kind of passport to the ideal life. He cannot be used simply to sanction human ideals and values belonging to a particular culture. Neither can he be used merely to fit into our cultural and ideological conceptions of reality.

Certainly other examples of the danger of making the Gospel conform to cultural patterns and ideologies could be drawn from the history of Christian thought but the three

\textsuperscript{72} Rene Padilla, op. cit., pp. 125-6.
examples cited should be sufficient to indicate the problems and limits of indigenous theology. Thus, in the remainder of this chapter, we shall deal with the important question of whether parameters can be developed within which indigenous theological reflection could be carried out while at the same time being sensitive to the question of the essentials of the Christian message.

B. Limits Of Indigenous Theology.

Writing on the implications from the New Testament on the contextualization (indigenization) of the Gospel, Ericson lists four limits or criteria for "acceptable" contextualization.

(1) The core: revelation and salvation effected in Jesus Christ;
(2) The substance: the gospel tradition in apostolic transmission;
(3) The application: exhortation addressed to particular people;
(4) The expression: quality of life in a cultural setting. 73

The degree of variability, he goes on to explain, is least in number one and greatest in number four. The reason for this stipulation is not far to seek. The core and substance of the Gospel are to remain constant if the latter is to be preserved in its purity, while its application and expression will vary in linguistic and cultural forms from one situation to another provided these conform to its basic intent.

From the New Testament, it can be discerned that within the parameters of the Christ-event and the apostolic tradition, there are variations of themes and motifs under which the Good News is expressed. While the Johannine emphasis, for instance, is upon the quality of life (eternal life) which Christ imparts, Paul speaks of justification and adoption, mostly in legal terms. It appears then that the cultural background of the particular audience determined the thought forms and motifs in which the Word of God was communicated.

The speeches in the Book of Acts provide some models. When the audience was familiar with canonical literature and the history of salvation, the proclaimer referred to these - e.g. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost; Paul's sermon to the Jews and proselytes at Antioch of Pisidia. (cf. Acts 2; 13: 16-51). When the hearers were unfamiliar with them, elements of local culture were utilized as points of contact - e.g. Paul's speech to a pagan audience in Athens.74

Given the audience and cultural adaptations in the presentation of the Gospel in the New Testament, what are the criteria for the indigenization of Christian thought? In view of the variety of cultural and religious traditions on the one hand, and the decisiveness of the Christian Gospel on the other, this writer proposes the following guidelines within

which Christian theology may be indigenized.\textsuperscript{75} These proposals flow from a Christian theism which presupposes the existence of a personal God - judging and loving, wise and free, powerful yet defenceless, transcendent yet immanent - who has revealed Godself in the person of Jesus Christ, and who has, through the power of the Holy Spirit, remained ever so active in the world, sustaining, guiding, recreating and liberating people from the powers of evil.

1. The Bible as foundation of theology.

In terms of methodology, an indigenous theology must maintain the primacy of divine revelation as normative for Christian faith and conduct. Since Christians believe that the revelation of God through Christ constitutes the core of the Gospel contained in scriptures, it follows that such a theology must be grounded on the witness of the Bible. This requirement has been voiced by various scholars. "Indigenous theology must be biblically-based," says Beeby.\textsuperscript{76} To that Visser 't Hooft adds, "The Christian Church in recognizing the canon of Holy Scripture has established the criterion in the

\textsuperscript{75} In formulating these proposals, I acknowledge my deep indebtedness to Charles Taber whom I believe has offered the most helpful guidelines for indigenizing the Gospel. In his article, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology," Missiology, Vol. 6 (January, 1978), pp. 69-77, Taber mentions seven points - methodological and substantive. The methodological criteria are: 1. biblical, 2. prophetic, 3. dialogical, and 4. open-ended, while (i) transcendent, (ii) Christological, and (iii) subject to the Holy Spirit are substantive criteria.

light of which we can distinguish between true and false ways of accommodating the Gospel." 77

What is meant by a "biblically-based theology?" From the standpoint of methodology, it means neither text-quoting fanaticism nor rabid fundamentalism; it is merely stating what should be obvious. It means that one must not be dogmatic about how we use or interpret the Bible, what the right understanding is and how its truth should be expressed. However, as Beeby has asserted,

one has to be dogmatic in insisting that IT [Indigenous Theology or any other theology] has to be built upon the Old and New Testaments. For the Christian theologian not to consciously accept the Biblical revelation as his norm and foundation is either incompetence or insanity. 78

The insistence upon 'sola scriptura' as the basis of faith and conduct arises from the normative character of the Judeo-Christian scriptures as God's revelation to human beings. This inevitably excludes other scriptures as being unequal to the Bible in terms of authority. The merit of Beeby's suggestion lies in the fact that it allows for flexibility and freedom in the approach to and interpretation of the Bible while at the same time insisting that theology be built upon the Old and New Testaments. The flexibility of approach and interpretation takes into account varying cultural perspectives and priorities.

2. Personal God: Transcendent and Immanent.

An indigenous theology must maintain the Christian belief relating to the personality of God, expressed in terms of transcendence and immanence. This is of fundamental necessity to any theology which claims to be Christian since Christian faith has to do with a personal God who has made Godself known to human beings, and with whom human beings can have a personal relationship. This God with whom humanity can establish a personal relationship is transcendent.

By virtue of being Creator of the universe, God transcends all; God is above and beyond humanity and nature. Neither is God part of the created order, nor is creation identifiable with God. However, whilst God transcends the created order God’s presence, at the same time, pervades the whole of creation which God rules, guides and sustains. The Incarnate Word of God demonstrates the truth that although there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity, God is deeply involved with humanity.

God is interested in and has made Godself accessible to human beings. Such an understanding of God immediately rules out any form of pantheism, idolatry, deism, absolute idealism, pan-en-theism and the like. At the same time, it keeps in proper balance God’s qualities of personality, transcendence, and immanence by ruling out any conception of God as an impersonal, absolute monarch without any emotion. Any theology which denies or fails to keep in balance these divine qualities is likely to end up with a god other than the God
and Father of Jesus Christ.

3. Christological.

A third requisite for any type of indigenous theology is that it be christological. That is, it must uphold the "decisiveness" of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humankind. This hardly needs mentioning at all. For, as Krikor Haleblian has rightly pointed out, to say indigenous theology must be Christological or that it must affirm revelation and salvation effected in Christ is really stating the obvious. After all Christian theology, indigenous or not, is by definition Christological and cannot be based on anything but the salvation in Jesus Christ.

However, the scandal of the particularity (historical, cultural, etc.) of the Incarnation makes it necessary to affirm that Jesus Christ, the same Jesus who lived in Palestine nearly 2000 years ago and who was raised to life and ascended to the right hand of God is today Lord, and that in the eschaton he will bring in his Kingdom. The Jesus we have to do with is the God-man as the Bible portrays him, not someone fashioned after one's own portrait of who Jesus ought to be.

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Furthermore, the christological foundation for theology must necessarily be emphasized in view of the need to safeguard the faith from what has been, in the history of Christian thought, a recurring tendency to emphasize either the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity or vice versa.

4. Human depravity and Need for repentance and Faith.

Any indigenous theology that claims to be Christian must affirm human sin and lostness as well as repentance and faith as response to God's offer of grace and forgiveness. This affirmation of human depravity should not minimize the goodness, rationality and creativity of humanity derived from being created in the image of God. Because of the rebelliousness of the human spirit, humanity has fallen short of its goal - to be in communion and fellowship with God. Human moral corruption becomes so pervasive that it renders humanity incapable of redeeming itself and human goodness unacceptable to God.

However, the way of moral renewal and restoration is offered by God alone. It is by grace through faith and not by any human effort or merit. Reconciliation with God is made possible through repentance and faith on the part of human beings. Denial of human fallenness and lostness would render the person and work of Christ unnecessary and God's grace extraneous.
5. Utilization of cultural resources.

Since indigenous theology is by definition, oriented to the cultural context and existential circumstances of people living in a particular locality, it must utilize appropriate cultural resources available for expressing the message of the Gospel. The language of the people immediately comes to mind. Linguistic idioms, imagery, symbolism, metaphors, are all viable means for communicating the substance of the message.

Secondly, there are local parables, folk tales, legends, myths narratives, both oral and literary which indigenous people have accumulated and treasured as a communal source of knowledge. All these, together with customs, traditions, philosophies, religious beliefs, have provided people with the means of understanding the world and reality. Taken together, they form a "system of meaning" by which life is lived. Now since theology has to do with the totality of human life, then all these certainly are important resources for theological articulation of the christian faith.

6. Prophetic.

An indigenous theology must serve a critical function in relation to the culture within which it is formulated. This must mean taking a prophetic stance within the cultural context or the community it seeks to serve. Indeed, an indigenous theology must affirm the positive values of the culture in which it is being done, but this should never be
taken to mean an unquestioning or wholesale acceptance of that culture.

Indigenous theology must consist of what Koyama calls "critical accommodational-prophetism and prophetic accommodation." Rather than merely taking the historical and cultural context seriously, an indigenous theology must challenge those aspects of the culture which express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil. It must aim to speak against those cultural aspects which militate against the substance of the Biblical message with a view to transforming them in the light of that message.

The same requirement is suggested by Visser 't Hooft in his proposed guidelines for an indigenous theology. Under what he calls "canonical accommodation," he suggests that the message fill the local or national cultural or religious concepts with biblical substance and so revolutionize them. Traditional cultural concepts should not be employed without critical evaluation and reinterpretation. The implication seems quite obvious. Without a critical analysis of culture, a theology is bound to entertain even those elements which markedly stand in direct contradiction to the truth of the gospel. To demonstrate this danger, Taber cites western theology as a case in point. One of the most flagrant failures of western theology, Taber asserts, is that,

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it has often tended to emasculate the Gospel, to accept, uncritically, profoundly unbiblical values and principles - even to provide gilt-edged justifications for some of the grossest evils of human history.\(^2\)

An indigenous theology therefore has critically to analyze the elements of a culture before utilizing them in the articulation of the faith.

7. Dialogical.

Another requisite of a sound indigenous theology is that it should be dialogical. That is to say, it should be produced as a result of, and with the intention of maintaining continual dialogue within the local community of believers; dialogue with the particular world - the culture, the religions, the politics, economics, the social system - in which it is being evolved, as well as dialogue with the world wide community of faith. This need for dialogue stems from two important recognitions. The first is the recognition that the experience of a particular faith community, in its encounter with the Gospel, is an indispensable source for what Robert Schreiter calls "local theologies."\(^3\) The second is the recognition of the unity of the christian faith and the

\(^2\) Charles Taber, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology," p. 73; See also, Visser 't Hooft, ibid., p. 6.

\(^3\) "Local Theology" is defined as the dynamic interaction among Gospel, church and culture. This interaction is understood to be a "dialectical" one, i.e. "continuing attention to first one factor, and then another, leading to an ever-expanding awareness of the role and interaction of each." See, Robert Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, (London: SCM, 1985), p. 20.
interdependence of the various parts of the One apostolic church which serves as the custodian of that one faith.

Regarding the first, Robert Schreiter writes:

the role of the whole community is often one of raising the questions, of providing the experience of having lived with those questions and struggled with different answers, and of recognizing which solutions are indeed genuine, authentic, and commensurate with their experience. The poet, the prophet, the teacher, those experienced with other communities may be among those who give leadership to the actual shaping into words of the response in faith. Gifted individuals, within the community and working on its behalf, give shape to the response, which then in turn is accepted or not by the community.\(^{84}\)

What is stressed here is the fact that a community of faith has a key role for theology's development and expressions. Not only does the faith experience of the community provide the foundation upon which a local theology is built, it also acts as an important guarantor of the authenticity of that theology.

Now, being primarily concerned with articulating the response in faith of a particular faith community, an indigenous theology would naturally have to engage in conversation with all aspects of the life of that community. An inevitable outcrop of this would be the prioritizing of questions and issues that are of critical importance to the life of its members. This would necessarily mean grappling with questions which may not at all be deemed important in another context, and likewise arriving at resolutions which may elsewhere be considered irrelevant. However, it must be stressed that in no way should this concern for the particular

\(^{84}\) ibid., p. 17.
allow the indigenous theologian to be disengaged from the universal aspects of theology and Church life.

For indigenous theology to be dialogical means to be in dialogue not only with its own context, but the whole body of the Church. After all, the christian faith which theology seeks to express in every generation finds its locus in the whole body of believers - the Church. By virtue of this, an indigenous theology must seek to maintain a proper balance between its particular concerns and a universal vision demanded by the universality of the Gospel. Failure to do this would inevitably lead to what theologians call theological provincialism. A valid indigenous theology must therefore be "particular but not provincial." It must demonstrate an awareness of the interdependence of all parts of the Church. Schreiter writes:

Thus there is no local theology without the larger church, that concrete community of Christians, united through word and sacrament in the one Lord. The Gospel without church does not come to its full realization; ... Without church there is no integral incarnation of the gospel.

Without this universal dimension, no indigenous theology can be deemed authentic. The following proposal by Dietrich Ritschl sums up in a precise way the necessity of indigenous

\[^{85}\text{According to Schreiter, the Church is a complex of those cultural patterns in which the gospel has taken on flesh, at once enmeshed in the local situation, extending through communities in our own time and in the past, and reaching out to the eschatological realization of the fullness of God’s reign. ibid., p. 21.}\]

\[^{86}\text{J. Deotis Roberts, } \textit{Black Theology in Dialogue,} \textit{(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987)}, \textit{p. 18.}\]

\[^{87}\text{Robert Schreiter, ibid., p. 21.}\]
theology to be dialogical. He states: "If you do engage yourself in Indigenous Theology do it thoroughly and joyfully with one eye fixed on your culture, the other one on the oikoumene." For theology to be truly indigenous, the theologian must seek to be in dialogue with both his/her local community as well as the ecumenical community of faith.

8. Flexibility.

Linked up with the previous point is the criterion of flexibility. An indigenous theology, as any theology, must be flexible enough to cater for the reality of radical changes: social, cultural, economic, political, religious, etc, in the contemporary world. Theology must move with the times if the meaning of the Gospel is to have a transforming and decisive effect on the lives of modern people. It must not be restricted to traditional formulations of the past such that the Gospel may appear to be unconcerned with the contemporary situation. Lee points out the peril of focusing theology on a past stage of culture.

Those who are concerned about indigenous theology reveal another tendency, viz., they have lost contact with the modern age. Many of them are interested in traditional thought only. But do Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Lao Tze, Mo Tze, and Buddhism represent all there is to Chinese culture as we find it today? ... M. M. Thomas is right in saying that in their efforts to indigenize

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88 This really is the last of ten theses developed in a series of lectures given by Dietrich Ritschl in Auckland (NZ) in August 1977. Access to a summary of these lectures was through a taped conversation between Dr. Ritschl and Professor Frank Nichol who was principal of Knox Theological Hall (Otago University) at the time.
theology the Asian churches must come to grips with the problem of modernization in the context of their inherited cultures. Flexibility in indigenous theological reflection means an openness to the present and the future. This does not mean that the past is written off as of no value. We certainly cannot ignore the great insights of the Church down through history. Rather, it means that while the past remains an important treasure house for the theologian to draw from and to evaluate his/her work, the reality of the present and future brings with them more pressing demands for immediate theological action.

Another reason for indigenous theology to be flexible and open-ended is the necessity for modesty about our grasp of biblical truth. No theology, no Christian community can claim monopoly on the truth of the Bible. For this reason, theological reflection can never be said to be finished. It is an on-going process of interpretation, reflection, expression aimed at guiding people to act and live as God wants them to. For this reason also, every Christian community needs the gifts and contributions of the others for their own enrichment. Likewise, every theology must need to be aware of the theological insights of others and be open to their criticisms and challenges in order that mutual correction and growth may result.

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9. Church as community of Love.

An indigenous theology includes as an essential element the call to the fellowship of the church, the community of love which is charged with the responsibility to make known God's words and deeds and to promote the worth and integrity of every person. This proposition calls attention to some dimensions of the Gospel hitherto neglected, namely, involvement in the world and promotion of the well-being of the total person. Christian theology must present the truth of salvation for the whole person. This emphasis coincides with the concern for social justice so clearly indicated in the Old Testament, and with Christ's proclamation of the kingdom of God.


No theological thinking is possible without the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical writers and all Christian thinkers down through history. The priesthood of all believers assumes that all believers have the Holy Spirit, who guides them in the understanding and application of the Scriptures to their own lives. The Holy Spirit is the dynamic guide who leads the church into all truth. The problem, however, is that too often in contemporary Christian thought and practice, the Spirit is either emphasized to excess by some or virtually neglected by others. Theology must therefore seek to overcome this by
acknowledging the role of the Holy Spirit in a balanced way. Not only that, since the God whom we seek to proclaim is a Trinitarian God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - it is of great importance that the Holy Spirit be given due consideration in any theology. An indigenous theology must give due attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and thought.
Introduction.

Theological reflection as a human intellectual activity cannot be done in isolation from the life of a faith community in which a theologian participates, as well as the life of the larger 'human' community (regional or universal, Christian or secular) of which the faith community is only a part. It is the immediate and particular community of believers which influences the thinking of its members. S. Paul Schilling once said that "theology does not exist in the abstract, but only as the thinking of particular theologians."¹ A logical deduction from this is that no theology can be fully understood without some understanding of the various factors that influence the thinking of a theologian.

Hence our task in this section (Part II) is to examine the theologies of Koyama and Song by a critical analysis of their writings. It is our hope that in the end we might be able to draw some conclusions as to whether or not they are attempting to do indigenous theology; and if so, in what ways.

In order to understand the thinking of these "particular" theologians with some degree of clarity, we need initially to gain some insights into their personal backgrounds. Hence beginning with Koyama, Chapter 5 would involve us in an examination of his life and the formative factors that

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influence his theological thinking. We will try and identify the primary forces at work in his particular situation which determine his understanding of the Christian message and his approach to the theological task of the Church. This would necessitate a survey of his writings in order to pin-point some of the characteristic emphases or key ideas as well as the underlying concerns and interests which motivate his theological reflections. A discussion of Koyama’s methodology would also be carried out in order to shed some light on his approach and where he is coming from.

In the next four chapters, we would examine the content of Koyama’s work by way of a thematic treatment. That is, by examining four themes which I believe are central and representative of Koyama’s thought. These are: History, (Chapter 6), God and idolatry, (Chapter 7); Buddhism and Christianity, (Chapter 8); and the phenomenon of Greed, (Chapter 9). An evaluation of Koyama’s theology in the light of our working definition of indigenous theology and the criteria for it that we set in the opening section and in the light of Koyama’s own achievement and contribution to Christian theology would be the subject of Chapter 10.

A similar procedure will be followed in examining Song’s theology. Chapter 11 serves as an introduction to his life and work. The next four chapters would take us through important themes in Song’s writing, namely, Mission (Chapter 12), History as the Continuation of Creation (Chapter 13), Theology and Culture (Chapter 14) and Theology and Politics (Chapter 15). Chapter 16 is an evaluation of Song. Conclusions arrived
at on the basis of our investigation and in accordance with our overall objectives would engage us in the final chapter (Chapter 17).
Let us begin by formulating some questions to help us with our investigation of Koyama’s life and work. What influences appear to be formative and crucial in the development of his theological thinking? Are there any discernible emphases in his writing? And what gave rise to these emphases? What underlying motives or concerns are suggested in his theological works? How does he integrate these concerns in articulating the message of the Christian gospel? How does he view the task of theology? How does he proceed in this theological task?

It is not our intention to try and answer these questions in the order they have been asked. Questions simply serve to guide us in our enquiry. Nevertheless, it is hoped that in the course of study, we would have established answers to at least most of them, if not all.

A. Life and Influences:

Kosuke Koyama was born into a Christian family in Tokyo in 1929. His grandfather had become a Christian through the preaching of a lay-Englishman, Herbert George Brand, who having graduated from Cambridge University in 1887 came to Japan in 1888. One of the few things Koyama heard from his grandfather was his conversion to Christianity from Buddhism. Koyama still remembers how impressed his grandfather was "by this man who was able to say that Christ is Lord without ever
making derogatory comments upon Japanese culture or Buddhism."²

When Koyama was five years of age, his father, who once was a successful business man but had lost his entire fortune in the disastrous earthquake of 1923, died from acute pneumonia in a Buddhist hospital run mainly by charity. Koyama remembers how his mother wrapped the body in a blanket and brought him home in a taxi driven by a Buddhist.³ These memories were to a considerable extent to influence his later thinking, especially with regard to the relationship between Christians and Buddhists. He writes:

The Bodhisattva hospital, the unknown taxi driver, ... and the Cambridge gentleman, ... are all in my mind when I participate in the ancient saying of the believing community: 'Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.'⁴

In 1942 at the age of thirteen, Koyama was baptized into the Christian faith. It was during this same year that the war between Japan and United States (only begun the year before) reached a new magnitude with the first U.S. Army air raid on Tokyo, Nagoya and Kobe. The memory of this raid as well as vivid recollections of ensuing events of the war and its culmination in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were to be of special theological significance for Koyama in later years. In his Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai where he offers a critique of idols, he writes,

² MFMS, pp. 15-16.
³ ibid., p. 15.
⁴ ibid., p. 16.
My interest in the subject of idolatry, I now know, began in 1945, the year of Hiroshima, when as a young boy I stood in bomb-devastated Tokyo. ... Was the fate of Japan in some way related to the violent growth of the cult of emperor worship? What began as a vague feeling in that tragic moment has become a preoccupation with the mysterious destructive power of idolatry in history. The memory of war refuses to disappear.

Although Koyama received a Christian upbringing at home, as a young Japanese boy, his overall development was moulded largely by the imperial cult in the schools. It is interesting to note that the "crisis of identity" which Koyama takes to be a form of human suffering — an important idea in Koyama's interpretation of the modern Asian historical scene — is something real in Koyama's own personal experience. As we have seen, in the same year he was baptized into the Christian faith, Japan was being bombed by a country which professed the Christian faith. Whilst he was being moulded by the Japanese imperial cult in school, he was being baptized into the religion of his country's enemy. In such circumstances, it would seem highly unlikely for Koyama not to have suffered from an identity-crisis himself. In other words, it would seem most probable for Koyama to have felt a tension between his being a Japanese and being a Christian.

Regarding his theological training, Koyama studied at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary under Kazo Kitamori until 1952 when he left Japan for further studies in the United States of America. At Drew University he obtained his B.D.

5 ibid., p. 3.

6 ibid. p. 5.

Then he went to Princeton Theological Seminary where he received a Master's degree and a Ph.D later on in 1958. His master's thesis was on Augustine and his doctorate on Luther: "Martin Luther's interpretation of the Book of Psalms." He also studied in Switzerland at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey. ⁸

In 1960 Koyama, now married to an American was commissioned as a missionary from the United Church of Christ in Japan to the Church of Christ in northern Thailand. During his nine years there (1960-1968), Koyama also taught theology at McGilvary Theological Seminary in Chengmai. For seven years (1968-1974) he was executive director of the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia (ATSSEA), Dean of the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST), and Editor of the South East Asia Journal of Theology, with headquarters in Singapore. He was also a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches for a number of years.

After fifteen years in South East Asia, Koyama then moved to New Zealand where he spent the next five years (1974-1979) as senior lecturer in the Religious Studies department at the University of Otago, Dunedin. Since 1980 he has been at Union Theological Seminary in New York where he is Professor of Ecumenics and World Christianity and teaches in the areas of Asian theology, intercultural hermeneutics, ecumenical history and theology, and the theology of religions.

Koyama’s career profile is certainly a very impressive one. But apart from its impressiveness, it prompts us to make two simple observations which go some way in explaining some of the underlying interests and concerns in his theological thinking. Firstly, his movements during his student years and during his ministry as missionary, pastor, theological educator, writer and religious teacher - from Japan to the United States, to Europe, back to the States, to South East Asia, to the South Pacific and finally back to the North Atlantic - suggest that Koyama is undoubtedly one of the most-travelled of all modern theologians.

The second observation derives directly from the first. Obviously, such extensive travels means that he has had the privilege of seeing and learning at first hand, much about the world outside of his own. His lengthy stays at different geographic locations means that he has had close and involved association with different peoples and cultures in a wide variety of human situations. Already steeped in the cultures of Asia, particularly Japan, Thailand and Singapore, his exposure to North-Atlantic, Continental European, Anglo-Saxon and Australasian cultures can only mean further enrichment. This wide and rich experience of both East and West, North and South, is clearly reflected in his writings.

Now these observations point us to and enable us to understand some of the interests underlying Koyama’s theology as well as the concerns which motivate his approach to the theological task. They help explain to some degree, Koyama’s great emphasis on human history and the reality of human
existence; on peoples, cultures, religions. They point us to some of his concerns, both regional and international, local and ecumenical. These include, to name a few, a concern for the integrity of humanity, for love, justice and peace among human beings regardless of their nationality, race, gender, religion and culture.

This human concern is reflected in his emphasis on the reality of suffering in Asia today through neo-colonialism and the forces of modernization and technology. For Koyama, by virtue of divine creation, being 'human' and being 'spiritual' are one and the same thing. From the perspective of the gospel centred on Jesus Christ, being human means to be appreciative of other peoples and their cultures. It means recognizing the value and worth of members of other faiths (Buddhism especially) and their contributions to our understanding of reality and interpretation of the message of the gospel. Thus the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity constitutes an important theme in Koyama's thought.

Koyama's concern for humanity is also seen in the importance of social ethics in his writings. For him, ethics and history are closely related. This close relationship is rooted in the truth about the Christian God as one who is deeply concerned with humanity in history. God's historical concern has ethical implications. Because of God's love for humanity, God also judges those who indulge in acts of injustice and inhumanity. Christians, by virtue of their missionary calling, ought to participate in the redemptive work of God in history. Christianity, which has to do with
this history-involved God, has an ethical responsibility. As
a historical religion, she has to be critical and speak out
against all evil forces which militate against God's
redemptive purpose for the world. Thus to criticize all forms
of human injustice is one function of Christian theology. In
Koyama's theology, the pervasiveness of idolatry and the
destructiveness of human greed are two related themes which
express this concern for the welfare of the human society.

Another major concern of Koyama involves the question of
the interpretation of the Bible in different contexts. A
survey of Koyama's writings in the next section may help us
to see some of these concerns and interests more clearly.

Our reading of Koyama has made it quite clear that what
has been the deepest and most influential factor upon Koyama's
theological thinking and his approach to the theological task
is his own personal experience of Asia, particularly Japan and
Thailand. The experience of bomb-devastated Tokyo in 1945 and
the terrible destruction of Japan during the second world war
are certainly at the roots of his theology. "I cannot see
Japan today in isolation from my experience in the demonic war
years, 1930-1945."9 For Koyama, the 'memory' of this
historical event has refused to leave him. It has become so
entrenched in his mind that for him, it has become a
"theological experience."10 The war and the destruction of
Japan have become, for him, the raw materials for theological
reflection.

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9 TMHG, Preface, p. ix.
10 MFMS, Preface, p. ix.
In the light of the biblical faith, reflection upon this experience has gradually led Koyama to see a "mysterious relationship between destruction and idolatry." It has led him to the conviction that idolatry is rooted in human greed. And whatever form idolatry takes, the truth is that God abhors it because it is always destructive not only for an individual but for the life of a nation.

Koyama’s experience of suffering during the war has also led him to emphasize suffering as a theological principle in his theology. But this war-time experience is not the only source of this emphasis on suffering. His personal experience only serves to highlight for him an important truth derived from the Bible, namely, suffering is part of the experience of God in dealing with humanity. God in Jesus suffered on the cross on account of humanity’s disobedience.

One of the marks of Koyama’s theology is an emphasis on the centrality of the "word of the cross" for theological interpretation of historical reality. In the preface of Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai, he writes: "The slow assimilation of the traumatic events of 1945, which only gradually yielded their theological implications, has moved me towards the emotive region of the cross of Christ." The cross stands at the core of the gospel message. It is the central symbol for interpreting the meaning of the Christian faith. It is from this theological perspective, then, that Koyama engages in the theological task of the Church in the context of Asia.

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11 TMHG, ibid.,

12 MFMS, ibid.,
Koyama's emphasis on the cross is very much influenced by Luther's 'theologia crucis' to which he was initially introduced by Kazo Kitamori, his teacher at Tokyo Theological Seminary. Kitamori's 'theology of the pain of God' has also been a considerable source of inspiration Koyama's theological reflections. Being a Luther scholar himself, it is to be expected that Koyama's emphasis on the cross owes a great deal to Luther's theology of the cross. Following Luther, Koyama sees the God who is revealed through the word of the cross as the 'hidden God' (deus absconditus), hidden in contradictions. To believe in, to hope in, to love and to obey this God means whole-hearted trusting in spite of God's seeming indifference and silence. It means not just 'fleeing to God' but "fleeing to God against God." This is the fundamental and paradoxical meaning of the Christian faith. This ultimate faith in God is demonstrated by the crucified Christ. Koyama's theology is therefore christocentric.

Reflection on the historical destruction of Japan also led Koyama to a critical evaluation of his own 'continuity-centred ashi kabi' culture. Together with this experience of Japan, Koyama's close contact with Buddhism during his missionary work in Thailand and the impression made

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13 WBT, pp. 115-125
14 MFMS, p. 247.
15 The image of a sprouting reed-shoot ("Ashi kabi"), according to Koyama, expresses the spirit of Japanese culture. A fundamental characteristic of this cultural spirit or mentality (world-view) is the belief in the continuity of the natural and the spirit world. The world is a constant process of 'becoming.' Thus gods and nature are continuous with each other. For a detailed explanation, see MFMS, pp. 59-67.
on him by the orientation of Thai culture toward nature rather than history, have led him to lay particular stress on the historical dimension of the Christian faith. He was led to an awareness of the importance of history in relation to the task of theological interpretation. History provides the framework for interpreting the meaning of the Christian gospel because it is in history that we come to encounter God in the crucified Christ. Here, Koyama is greatly inspired by the theological insight of Abraham Heschel regarding history as the 'record of God's experience.'

Realization of the radical difference between the 'cosmological' spirituality of Asia and the 'historical' spirituality of Christianity provoked Koyama to the task of finding a theological category to bridge the two. Underlying this concern is a search for a methodological approach to the missionary task of proclaiming the Christian message to peoples in Asia. Koyama's interest in the question of the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity comes within the context of this missiological concern. Koyama sees Christianity as a dynamic, active, incarnational faith in contrast to the placid, detached, aloof piety of Buddhism. But he is not concerned with seeking some mystical or contemplative contribution which Buddhism can make to Western Christianity. On the contrary, as he repeatedly states, he is concerned with how to address the Christian message to people - "Buddhists, not Buddhism" - in the context of their human existence. "It is the actual flesh and blood people of South

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16 MFMS, p. 4.
East Asia," he writes, "not the abstractions of their religious system, to whom the missionary must address himself." 17

Koyama's intimate involvement with the process of theological education in Southeast Asia also plays a significant part in the direction he has taken as far as the approach to theology is concerned. Acknowledging the 'critical Asian principle' 18 of authentic contextualization, Koyama seeks after a way of proclaiming the Christian gospel in the particular context Asia today.

B. Survey: Writings, Key Ideas, Style.

Koyama's prolific writing career began soon after he embarked on his missionary work in Thailand. During the sixties and early seventies, a stream of articles penned by him regularly appeared in the South and North-east Asian journals of theology. From these earlier writings, two general observations may be made. Firstly, many of the themes which frequently appear in Koyama's later writings are given a preliminary treatment, so to speak, in this early period. Themes such as the 'brokenness of human reality,' 19

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17 WBT, p. 129ff

18 Refer Chapter 2 for explanation of this principle.

'the encounter of Buddhism and Christianity,'\textsuperscript{20} 'communicating the gospel,'\textsuperscript{21} 'the importance of neighbour,'\textsuperscript{22} 'the complexity of history and its importance in theological interpretation,'\textsuperscript{23} are a few examples. Moreover, we recognize here two emphases which are of crucial importance to Koyama's theology as far as this is discernible from his major works. These are, one: his stress on the importance of 'history' based on the historicity of the Biblical God, and two: the centrality of the 'crucified Jesus' in all his theological deliberations. The second observation is this. Basic to Koyama's writing is an apparent interest to find a way of "re-rooting" the original Christian kerygma in the context of Southeast Asia. It is a conscious effort to re-state the message of the Gospel in a way that is "faithful


\textsuperscript{21} Kosuke Koyama, "Strengthen the Discernment of the 'Christocentric,' (German Mysticism in Thailand) - [exemplis discimus!"

\textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 4, no. 4 (October 1962), pp. 52-60; "Prelude to Preaching" (As God has deceived us! As God has prevailed over us), \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 5, no. 4 (April 1964), pp. 55-56.

\textsuperscript{22} Kosuke Koyama, "Prelude to Neighbour-ology," \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 8, nos. 1 & 2 (Jul - Oct 1966), pp. 171-175.

to the text" and "relevant to the context," to use Elwood's phrase.\textsuperscript{24} A way of speaking about God's love in Christ which appropriates and utilizes Asian thought-forms and theological raw materials.

Many of these major themes, emphases and concerns of Koyama are brought together in his \textit{Waterbuffalo Theology}, published in 1974. They are brought to focus on the question: How is Christianity to be effectively presented to people in Southeast Asia? Writing from the context of Southeast Asia - particularly Thailand - where the spirit of Buddhism is most pervasive and the spirituality is largely 'cosmological' compared to the 'historical' spirituality of Christianity, Koyama searches for a way to bring the gospel to speak to the hearts of the people. His personal experience of the Asian cultures and religions together with his close involvement with the processes of theological education in Asia lead him to what he considers to be a viable possibility. That is, applying the contextualization insight of the TEF Committee to the Asian situations.\textsuperscript{25} To follow this way means to take seriously the histories of Asia and the realities of actual human existence in any Christian theologizing. It means "letting theology speak in and through the context" of Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{25} WBT, pp. 20-26.

Asia and letting theology speak through the context constitute what is known as 'authentic contextualization' which Koyama defines as "critical accommodational-prophetism and prophetic accommodation."^27

According to the policy statement of the TEF Committee, authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising out of genuine encounter between God's Word and the world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.^28 In Koyama's work, authentic contextualization is understood, in part, in terms of the language of theology. A language which seeks to express the content of Gospel in clear and familiar terms that Asian people can understand. Authentic contextualization also refers to the critical accommodational-prophetic mission of the Church which Koyama understands in terms of 'suffering' and 'self-denial' based on Jesus' self-denial on the cross. For the church to be accommodationally prophetic means to be totally committed to Christ. It means that Christians ought to be ever prepared to embody the redemptive message of the gospel in their beings as a community of faith and as individual members, even to the extent of being rejected and considered "refuse and the offscouring of all things." It means that the Church ought to experience history adopting and following the 'crucified mind' of Christ portrayed in Matthew

^27 WBT, p. 21.

By being ready to suffer for the sake of others as Jesus did for the sake of the world, the Church is truly engaged in authentic contextualization. In other words, the Church is able to accommodate the redemption wrought by God in Christ through her own life of 'servanthood' and self-denial in relation to other people in history, by embodying the good news of God's salvation in her life of service to others.

Koyama's second publication, No Handle on the Cross, appeared in two years after the first. In a series of meditations, Koyama continues to develop the themes of indigenous theology criticizing Western theology and the relation of the Asian world to Jerusalem, Rome, Canterbury and Geneva which he initially gave in Waterbuffalo Theology. The series of meditations focuses on two important questions: (1) How Christianity can become historical, and (2) What is the relation of traditional religions to the contemporary world, and specifically to Christianity? For Koyama, the primary image for understanding and explication of the Christian truth urgently needed today in Asia is the image of Jesus carrying a "handle-less cross." This is the crucified Jesus' way, the way of 'self-denial.' The call to self-denial based on Jesus' words in Matthew 16: 24 thus constitutes the most pervasive theme of the book.

Characteristic of the way of Jesus is the "crucified mind." The 'crucified character' is a mark of the apostolic church derived from Jesus. And only by taking this crucified way of Christ can Christianity become historical. Only through
the "crucified and risen mind" of Christ can Christians see "something more" and spiritually meaningful in the histories and traditional religions of Asia, against the background of the misdirected spirituality of modern secularism.

Koyama's third publication, *Meditations* (1978), contains, as the title implies, biblical meditations and theological reflection on a number of themes based on his own personal experience of both East and West. Among other themes, a prominent one is the encroachment of modern technology upon the life of prayer and the life of Asian heritage spiritualities. Here we see another basic concern of Koyama, namely, the relationship between the modern spirituality inspired by technology and traditional religious experience. How is the message of the bible to be addressed and interpreted in the Asian (and international) context where technology's 'powerful hold upon the city and upon the great religions' is very real? For Koyama, technology rather than religion has become indispensable. This insight is highlighted by an experience at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Burma where once pilgrims walked barefoot long distances to the temple. Now with the introduction of elevators and trams by the religious authorities, one is left in confusion as to whether one is a "pilgrim or a tourist." Such an experience is characteristic of Asians in the modern world. With the prevalence of what Koyama calls the "technological mind" in

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29 SOM, pp. 15-17.

30 ibid., p. 10.
the modern world, a fundamental confusion has arisen among human beings. In Asia especially, such confusion expresses a loss of basic self-identity; a loss of the fundamental meaning of what humanity is. It portrays a disruption in the relationship between human beings and the 'holy.' This disruption, Koyama observes, is today shaking not only the whole of Asia, but the whole world as well. What does the Church do in this situation? This is the kind of question Koyama is raising and trying to address.

The other two main works are Three Mile an Hour God (1978) and Mount Fuji and Mt. Sinai (1984). In these books, Koyama resumes the major themes of his previous works. What concerns he has already expressed in his former writings are further developed here. For instance, in the Three Mile an Hour God, which contains a total of 45 meditations, we see again Koyama's concerns with (a) the dangers of our affluent society ("saturation culture"); (b) Christian relationship with people of other faiths, and (c) issues of social justice. A key idea in this book is Koyama's characterization of God as a 'slow God'; a God who walks at the speed of three miles an hour with people because of love for them. God's love for humanity means God appreciates humanity. Thus Koyama looks upon people of other faiths with sympathy and understanding. Yet at no stage does this in any way compromise his faith in Christ.31

Time and again Koyama returns to the history and role of Japan during the last century which he characterizes as the period of "the destructive use of idolatry." (Preface) Beginning from the imperial idolatry of his own country up to 1945, and its replacement by the technological imperialism and idolatry of the post-war years, Koyama tries to pin-point the ethical and spiritual dilemmas of a world whose power structures are so developed that they can only promote a consumer-oriented economic growth, enforced, if necessary by the crude use of force.32

But the central theme of the book is the love of God. For Koyama, God's love is characterized by a 'three-mile-an-hour' redemptive speed which stands in contrast to the purposeless technological speed of modern society. God's love is the source of healing from the wounds inflicted upon people by the idolatry of the emperor worship in Japan during the 1930-1945 period.

The subject of idolatry is given comprehensive treatment in the Mt. Fuji and Mt. Sinai. The book is divided into four parts, each prefaced by an apt biblical quotation. In Part One, Koyama applies his understanding of biblical theology to his own traumatic experiences as a young Christian living in a nation given over to emperor-worship and sun-worship and who witnessed the complete humiliation and defeat of Japan. Part Two is an account of Koyama's agonizing theological quest from which he draws the conclusion that the sin which a Holy God

can never tolerate is the sin of idolatry in any and all of its manifestations. Such a sin continues to be a pervasive and destructive influence in all cultures and religions, not excluding Christianity. In Part Three, religious developments in Japanese history are outlined and discussed; the impact of Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity, and the devastating effects of the rise of State Shintoism. Part Four leads up to the final chapter on the 'Theology of the Cross', where an 'impassioned God' freely offers Godself in Christ for the redemption of the world.

The style of Koyama's theology is striking. It is full of freshly coined imagery and pregnant phrases - 'history-gravity' means suffering-gravity;' the West as 'both gun and ointment' for the East; taking Christ with 'Aristotelian pepper and Buddhist salt;' the Promised Land as 'a busy, dangerous, unsettling intersection-land' where Asia, Africa, and Europe meet; the danger of Christianity's 'teacher complex;' the contrast of the 'obvious attractiveness' of an air hostess with the 'theological beauty' of some old, wrinkled Russian women; 'the crucified

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33 WBT, p. 23.
34 ibid., p. 46.
35 ibid., p. 78f.
37 Kosuke Koyama, "Christianity Suffers from Teacher Complex," p. 71.
38 50M, pp. 112-115.
mind as the mind trained under the weight of the cross without a handle;' 39 the 'unemployed God who meets us at the periphery.' 40 Koyama's gift for words is quite remarkable. H. Boone Porter has rightly observed that "he [Koyama] has no inhibitions about coining distinctive words and phrases." 41 And it is in this, says Peter Walker, that is, in Koyama's "not being afraid to take a word or phrase and put it out to work," that the power and energy of his writing is derived. 42

Typically, Koyama uses a lot of images and symbols - often down to earth and everyday life ones - to express and make a theological point. A one time colleague of Koyama refers to his method as "like a new form of Jesus' teaching in parables." 43 It is this 'new parabolic style,' to paraphrase the point of Albert Moore's comment, which makes Koyama's writings so profound yet eminently readable. It makes his theology 'evocative' and 'impressive.' 44 C. W. Forman makes a similar comment in a review of No Handle on the Cross, saying that Koyama's "lively, picture-laden way" of writing

39 NHC, Chap. 1.  
40 MFMS, p. 251.  
43 This comment was made during a conversation with Prof. A. C. Moore who was the head of the Religious Studies department of Otago University (NZ) where Koyama was once a staff member.  
44 Peter Walker, loc., cit.,
makes him always interesting to read."  

Koyama's theology is not concerned to develop lengthy analyses or arguments; it subverts or explodes positions that seem to him too neatly systematic and coherent, and it points in many ways to the complexity, variety and ambiguity of reality. A notable feature of Koyama's style is his steadfast evasion of the systematic. According to Alan Thompson, this is an influence Koyama inherited from Luther and Uchimura, the Japanese Kierkegaard. From Luther, Koyama learnt that "not reading books or speculating, but living, dying and being damned make a theologian." From Kanzo Uchimura he learnt that while spiritual life (in terms of church) takes form and system, it is at the same time free from them. Life comes first and system second. In a review of Waterbuffalo Theology, W. J. Hollenweger says,

>The bias against the abstract means that he could not choose a systematic (and in the ordinary sense of the word) and a coherent approach for his theology. ... the unity of the book being not an underlying common principle but Asian flavour and spices.

There are few confident overviews in Koyama's theology. Rather there is a constant questioning, ethical and imaginative engagement with particular issues and situations,

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47 NHC, p. 85.

48 50M, p. 106.

and the attempt to open them up to a better understanding and future. It proceeds usually in short bursts and in a staccato style which provokes the reader and creates new perceptions and connections. Such an approach is "dialogical and practical." Dialogical in the sense that Koyama tries to create a relationship of dialogue between Christianity and Asian cultures and faiths by questioning certain positions and eliciting responses towards common and important issues of social and ethical concern. Also Koyama does this through an interpretation of the biblical message which combines the prophetic and wisdom literature in order to suit the perplexing, agonizing and exciting meeting of ancient and modern, Buddhist and Christian, East and West, rich and poor. Koyama's approach is 'practical' in the sense that his theology is related to the reality of life: with its struggles, suffering, joy, and frustrations. It is concerned with problems and issues which real human beings struggle with in their everyday life.

A lively engagement with the Bible runs through all of Koyama's theology. It is not at the level of arguing for a particular status for Scripture or a doctrine of revelation or inspiration. It uses Scripture in a variety of ways, often offering new imaginative insights or making surprising links with modern situations. Its apparent spontaneity and even naivety can be deceptive: it conceals and is disciplined by an acquaintance with modern scholarship and by wide learning

50 David Ford, loc. cit.,

51 ibid.,
in the Christian tradition, especially in patristics, Luther and the 20th century biblical and ecumenical theology.

C. Methodology:

Koyama does his theology from two starting points. The first is his existential perspective as an Asian; an Asian who is both Japanese and Christian. As such he wishes to affirm: (1) the complex historical reality of Asian human existence, with its diverse cultures, religions, ideologies, etc. "It gives me great joy" he writes, "to know that he [Buddha] was an Asian."52 (2) the truth of the Christian gospel as it has come to influence the lives of many Asian people, in the face of numerous challenges and problems arising out of the process of change - political, social, economic, cultural, religious, etc - taking place in Asia in the modern era. He wants to affirm the heritage that the Christian tradition has brought to Asia.

In affirming his Asian and Christian heritages, Koyama does not remain uncritical of demonic elements within Asian histories and cultures which lend themselves to the destruction of human integrity and shalom. Nor does he pretend to be blind to those aspects of Christian faith and practice which are considered to be at odds with the spirit of the biblical faith which he seeks to affirm. Koyama's theology is certainly prophetic in the sense that it is critical of both Asia and Christianity. At the same time it tries to

52 50M, p. 82.
accommodate the redemptive truth of the Christian gospel in Asian terms in the hope of creating a positive relationship between the two realities in terms of a healthy dialogue and mutual enrichment.

It is commonly understood that the primary concern of theology is the relationship between God and human beings. This is taken to be the fundamental relationship which holds together all other components of the Christian faith such as sin, salvation, belief in God, Christ, etc. Thus any theology that does not deal primarily with that relationship is meaningless theology. Given the widely accepted pluralism of theological methods today, Koyama’s attempt to interpret and understand this God-human relationship is carried out within the framework of human history.

History for Koyama is the primary context for theological thinking. We cannot speak about the God-human relationship outside of historical existence. This is because being human necessarily means living and participating in history. Also, God according to the biblical tradition, is a God who participates in the history of humankind. As we pointed out earlier, Koyama’s understanding of history is illuminated by Abraham Heschel’s insight concerning the prophetic understanding of history as the experience of God. As such, history "belongs to the primary theological concern"; that is to say, history is an important dimension of any God-talk

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54 MFMS, p. 4.
Since history is an important theme in Koyama's writings, it has seemed appropriate to treat it separately in the next chapter. In the meantime, it will suffice to note that Koyama's understanding of history determines, to a large extent, his theological task and objective.

What is Koyama's theological programme? What does he see as the task of theology in Asia? How does he go about it? Koyama's understanding of history as the 'experience of God' leads him to what he considers to be the primary theological task of Asian Christians. The following statement is an indication of what that task is.

The study of the relationship between God and history provides the theological discernment and freedom needed for the rooting of the Gospel in the acutely changing Asian world of the past hundred years. The theological task Koyama has in mind is basically a 'rooting of the Gospel' in the histories of Asia. What does this mean? It is an attempt to accommodate or 're-root' the Christian message in Asian soil by taking seriously the context of Asian people in the totality of their historical existence. This has to do with the articulation of the Christian message which utilizes the resources found in Asia in order that a creative dialogue may be initiated between the Gospel and the environment in which its message is proclaimed.


56 ibid., p. 7.

57 Part I of Koyama's Waterbuffalo Theology is headed "Interpretation of History." The phrase 'Rooting the Gospel' is used as the title for Part II.
Such a task involves consideration of human feelings, questions and problems which people experience; issues arising from within the Asian situations, and seeking answers for them in the light of the Christian Gospel centred on Jesus Christ. It involves listening to and addressing with all seriousness, the challenges and contributions of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims etc. It takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of Asian people.\(^{58}\)

Underlying Koyama's theological program are a number of assumptions and concerns the first of which is his understanding of history we have spoken about. For Koyama, awareness of the importance of history leads him to an awareness of the importance and value of human cultures. Here, Koyama is thinking of Asian cultures especially. Human history, he declares, is always cultural. "A denuded a-cultural history is an impossibility."\(^{59}\) Thus to say that history is a 'record of God's experience' implies an interrelatedness between theology and culture. This implication points to the necessity of rooting the gospel in the cultures of Asia.

Yet Koyama realizes that Asian Christians have been unduly timid in understanding and tackling this 'unavoidable challenge' of rooting the Gospel in their own cultural milieu. He is concerned about this lack of enthusiasm on the part of

\(^{58}\) WBT, p. 20.

\(^{59}\) MFMS, p. 5.
Asians. He suggests two possible sources of this to be, firstly, an uncritical acceptance of the "Western form" of Christianity. Asians did not examine seriously the relationship between this particular form (Gospel accommodated to the West) and the message of the Gospel itself. Consequently acceptance of this "foreign" expression of religious experience seemingly "established" itself almost as the only acceptable form of Christian practice and identity in Asia. 60

Secondly, when the Gospel came with its "strange idea of God in history," that is, history as experienced by God, the Asian Christians were unable to grasp the full import of the history-bound dimension of divine freedom. This particular weakness hindered needed theological discussions and insights for the task of indigenization. 61

A second basic assumption underlying Koyama's concern is the recognition that mission in Asia is no longer the monopoly of Western Christendom. 62 The same recognition exists with regard to theology. The understanding is that Christianity has entered into a new stage of life. This change of affairs has important implications for Asian Christians with regard to methods of evangelism and theological thinking. It suggests that now Asians ought to work out their own theological agenda in the light of their situation and try to re-interpret the


61 ibid.,

On a regional level, this recognition is first expressed in the need for what the Christian Conference of Asia (EACC) calls, a "living theology" defined as "the manner in which a Church confesses its faith and establishes its historical existence in dialogue with its own environment."63 It is also given expression in what the Indonesian theological educators call a 'Double Wrestle'64 and what the Theological Education Fund (TEF) calls "Authentic Contextualization."65 According to this latter committee, such a program as Koyama is attempting is not without theological basis. It is a necessity rooted in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.66

A third presupposition underlying Koyama's theological program is the apparent gulf between the world of Asia and that of Christianity. Given his extensive knowledge and experience of the Asian continent, Koyama presupposes in his writings an awareness of a fundamental difference between the spirituality of the bible and that of Asia. A difference which in his view is rooted in different understandings of history. The following sentence is an indication of Koyama's awareness of this fact. "The strongly linear view of history in the


64 Indonesian Consultation on Theology and Theological Education, 1970.


66 WBT, p. 21.
biblical tradition, based on the faith that God is the governor of history, is not indigenous to the life and thought of the peoples of Asia." For Koyama, this difference obviously poses grave problems for both Christian mission and theology in Asia. For example, how do you address the truth of the gospel to Asians whose spiritual orientation is completely different from that of the Biblical tradition? By and large, it is the realization of such problems that provides the impetus for Koyama to engage in the task of re-rooting the gospel in the context of Asia. The problem comes into clear relief when Koyama looks at the issue of human suffering found in the world and particularly among Asian nations.

Having looked at some of the assumptions and presuppositions behind Koyama's theology, it is not difficult to realize that the concern of Koyama to re-root the message of the gospel in the histories of Asia is, in effect, really an attempt to work out an authentically indigenous 'Asian theology.' What do we mean by this phrase? The meaning has been well expressed by J. A. Veitch in his defence of the case for the possibility of an Asian theology. Asian theology, he says,

67 ibid., p. 52.
is a theology shaped, moulded and related to a specific historical context, by particular socio-cultural and religious factors (religious here includes philosophical) so that the emerging form of this theology differs in emphasis and possibly in structure, though not necessarily in content, from other kinds of theology - eg. Western theology in either its continental or American cultural form.\textsuperscript{68}

Hence what Koyama envisions is the emergence of a theology which takes as its foremost concern the historical reality of Asian existence. That is, a theology which begins with real human questions arising from Asian life and Asian situations. A theology that is neither dependent on Western theological constructs nor accepts its peculiar 'form' of Christianity as an absolute theological norm, but one that is 'shaped, moulded and related to the specific historical context' of Asia, so much so that it takes on a somewhat distinctively Asian character. In shaping and moulding an Asian theology, Koyama suggests that it is necessary for Asian theologians to maintain their own unique "Asian-ness." And they do this by daring to use "their own style of living and method of thinking" in the act of communicating the Gospel of Christ to their fellow Asians.\textsuperscript{69} A good illustration of Koyama's initial attempt at re-rooting the gospel in the Asian situation is given in the Waterbuffalo Theology. There, in the context of his mission in northern Thailand, he indicates that he is primarily concerned with the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in as simple a language as possible, so that


\textsuperscript{69} Kosuke Koyama, 'Editorial' of \textit{SEAJT}, Vol. 5, no. 1 (July 1963), p. 4.
its message may be clearly understood by his hearers. In the preface he writes,

On my way to the country church, I never fail to see a herd of waterbuffaloes grazing in the muddy paddy field. This sight is an inspiring moment for me. Why? Because it reminds me that the people to whom I am to bring the gospel of Christ spend most of their time with these waterbuffaloes in the rice field. The waterbuffaloes tell me that I must preach to these farmers in the simplest sentence-structure and thought-development. They remind me to discard all abstract ideas, and to use exclusively objects that are immediately tangible. 'Sticky-rice,' 'pepper,' 'dog,' 'cat,' 'bicycle,' 'rainy season,' 'leaking house,' 'fishing,' 'cock-fighting,' 'lottery,' 'stomach-ache,'—these are meaningful words for them."

Obviously, Koyama's concern involves the hermeneutical question of interpretation; how the gospel message is to be expressed in a different context. How does he as a missionary bring God's Word to encounter these Thai farmers most meaningfully and thus enabling the message of the Word to challenge and transform their lives? What Koyama is pointing to is the language of proclamation, the language of preaching. This is the problem arising out of the situation. Through analysis of the problem as well as awareness of the real life situation of his audience, Koyama comes to the resolution that the Word of God has to be contextualized. The meaning of the Gospel message can only be communicated 'through rootedness in and commitment to the given historical moment' of these Thai people. This means that the simplest language available is called for. The Christian message has to be expressed in such a way that simple folk can readily understand. For Koyama, this necessarily means discarding all abstract ideas.

\[70\] WBT, Preface, pp. vii-viii.
and foreign terminology, but using everyday word pictures and examples, images and symbols that people are familiar with: 'sticky-rice, pepper, dog' etc. From the tangible objects and terms that are truly meaningful to the daily experience of life in the human context, the missionary can then make an easier transition to speaking about God in Christ to these people.

According to Koyama, it is making the "people" the priority that calls for this type of approach. He believes that in any proclamation of the gospel, the audience must be given priority. People, in the normal situations of their historical life, to whom the Christian message is addressed must be kept in mind if the message is to be meaningful at all. What they experience, how they live, feel, think, etc; how they interpret and understand reality and the world all have to be taken into account in the task of Christian proclamation.

I am sent to 'this' congregation today. I begin speaking from where they are (ie. cock-fighting). From talking about the human situation I go on to call God into this real human situation. It is not I, but my audience, who determines this approach of 'theology from below.'

'Rooting the Gospel' in the histories of Asia, then, is for Koyama, an approach to theology which begins 'from below,' from the existential situation of people's life. It is theology which germinates from the real historical situations in which one lives and has his/her experiences.

71 ibid., p. viii
The attempt, therefore, to articulate the Christian faith begins with the human context of which the theologian is a part and in which (s)he is involved. In short, theology begins from one's historical context. Theology in northern Thailand must begin with the need of the Thai farmers and not with the great thought developed in Summa Theologiae and church Dogmatics. "Is not involvement the only soil from which theology germinates?" he asks. "Theology for northern Thailand begins and grows in northern Thailand, and nowhere else." Since theological thinking cannot take place outside the particularity of one's historical context, Koyama claims that theological questions raised elsewhere as well as answers considered to be appropriate there may not be at all relevant and satisfactory for the particular context of Asia. He suggests that for Asian theology, attention must be called to some of the 'raw materials' and 'raw situations' in Asia itself. What theological issues are discernible in the histories of Asia? What does the bible say about them? This is the departure point for Asian theology. "Third world theology begins by raising issues, not by digesting Augustine, Barth and Rahner."

In Koyama's writings, one of the issues that is often pointed to is suffering. For him, suffering characterizes the

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72 ibid.,


74 WBT, p. 3.
reality of Asian existence. This observation is drawn from his personal experience of Asia. In Thailand, for example, the reality of life is summed up in the words 'human brokenness.' Koyama writes,

Broken marriages, broken families, broken lives are the threads that make the fabric of the society around us. Poverty, sickness, ignorance, superstition, fear of demons and finally the sense of resignation encircle us. And ourselves are 'sick men' as Augustine said. Human brokenness is the formidable and inescapable reality of life.\textsuperscript{75}

Another form of suffering experienced by Asians is what Koyama calls the "crisis of identity" resulting from the shaking of the foundation caused by the meeting between relentless historical changes and spiritual forces. Caught amidst this meeting point, Asian life becomes 'profoundly disturbed and complicated.' A sign of this is given by the fact that "within one Thai person, there may be three or four Thais living in conflict. This is true with the Filipinos and Indonesians. It is said that there are seven Japanese within one Japanese."\textsuperscript{76} For Koyama, the tragedy of depression amongst 900 million Indians as well as the suffering of the whole world is a hard rock fact, "a brutally obvious reality to all men."\textsuperscript{77} Thus human suffering definitely is a burning theological issue for Asia.

Now if suffering is the reality of Asian life, how is that truth to be reconciled with the reality of the bible

\textsuperscript{75} Kosuke Koyama, "Eating with human Brokenness, We Meet the Paraclete," p. 54.

\textsuperscript{76} Kosuke Koyama, "Theology in the Time of Acute Complexity in History," p. 6.

\textsuperscript{77} ibid., p. 14.
which speaks of the redemptive truth concerning God's merciful and loving engagement with humanity in Christ? How can the church confess her faith in the face of two totally contrasting realities? Koyama's answer is that the church can confess her faith when she proclaims that the language which can bind these two realities is the language of the cross.

Theologia crucis will give us a perspective in which we can look at, participate in, the suffering of mankind. ... Apart from theologia crucis, we will be held guilty of advocating, more or less, Christ in the inspiration of Mary Poppins who can hold things together easily (cheaply) by a snap of her fingers. 78

This brings us to the other perspective from which Koyama does his theology.

The second starting point of Koyama's theology is his theological apprehension of the cross as the centre of the Christian message. His theology is in effect drawn from his christological understanding that the cross expresses the very heart of God in dealing with the world. The cross reveals the mind of God in relation to humanity. Heavily influenced by Luther and Kitamori, Koyama's theology is a theologia crucis: he places the cross in the very centre of his faith and interprets its content as the Word of the passionate God who suffers because of love for the sinful world. Who God is, is revealed for us in the 'Word of the cross' which Koyama understands as the love of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. 79


79 WBT, p. 215
Koyama's own theology, as we have indicated, is strongly Christ-centred. He believes that since the Christian message as proclaimed in the Scriptures is 'christocentric' in nature, then every theology that claims to be Christian must have some definite relationship with the centre of the biblical message - Jesus Christ crucified. If any theological thought is worthy to be studied, it must have some position of its own towards the Biblical proclamation of Christ. "How does Christ stand in this or that theology? Is it christocentric, having 'decided to know' only 'Christ and him crucified', ...?"  

What Koyama is saying is that the principle of christocentricity must serve as the most crucial criterion by which all theologies ought to be judged whether Christian or not.

In Koyama's mind this is the final question with which one can examine any Christian theological thought. With regard to Asian theology, Koyama reminds Asian Christians that theological reflection must focus on the message of the crucified Jesus. Only in relation to that centre can Asian theology find its 'self-identity, inter-relationship and co-ordination. Everything must be judged by this centre reality.

The christocentric emphasis of Koyama's theology is well reflected in his view of what theological education ought to be. Theological education, he asserts, is education into "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," Theological

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80 Kosuke Koyama, "Strengthen the Discernment of the 'Christocentric'," p. 35.
education does not operate on any self-assured autonomous principle of education but on the principle of the history-disturbing "finger of God." It receives its spiritual vision and intellectual insight by experiencing that 'for your sake he [Jesus] became poor.' In other words, 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' is the primary reality for theological education.

Koyama distinguishes between the Word (logy) of the cross and other words. He points to a subtle difference between the 'logy' of theology and the 'logy' of zoology, biology and other studies. The 'logy' of theology goes through spiritual pain and struggle to express and articulate what God has spoken and is speaking to us today. In that sense, logy of theology is a spiritual-logos, the logos participating in the faith inspired by Jesus Christ who, on the cross, gave up himself completely for our sake. Theology therefore must be rooted in the critical and enlightened understanding of 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God,' and how in that divine power and wisdom human life is recreated to find new meaning and hope. In theology, he writes,

> the subject matter is the coming of new life and new possibility (hope, judgment, promise, resurrection ...) into this world of ours in Jesus Christ. It speaks of new possibilities for the individual as well as the community.\(^{81}\)

In Koyama's theology, the Word of the cross becomes the theological category for illuminating the redemptive truth of God. It provides the theological perspective by which the

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\(^{81}\) Kosuke Koyama, "Reflections on the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia," p. 12.
reality of God in relation to humanity can be interpreted, expressed and communicated. From this theological perspective, Koyama reflects on important themes of the Christian faith and interprets human history in all its complexity.
A fundamental idea or principle which underlies most of Koyama's writing is that of history. This appears to have a determinative influence upon his interpretation of the biblical message. Thus a more accurate understanding of Koyama's theology perhaps would be more likely if we started with an investigation of this theme. How does he understand history? What part does history play in the approach to the theological task? How does he relate history to the Christian message?

A. History: Records of God's experience with humanity.

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, Koyama's theology is considerably influenced by Abraham Heschel. The latter's insight regarding the prophetic understanding of history underlies much of Koyama's interpretation of the Christian Gospel centred on Jesus Christ the Word of God.

According to Heschel, what concerns the prophet is the human event as a divine experience. "History to us is the record of human experience; to the prophet it is a record of God's experience."¹ In other words, human events are viewed in relation to God. History is understood as the experience of God rather than the experience of human beings. It is the place where God comes to meet people; the arena in which God's

will - of justice and love for humanity - comes to concrete expression.²

Heschel finds that the "chief characteristic of prophetic thought is the primacy of God's involvement in history."³ The prophets constantly proclaim God's intimate relatedness to human beings in history. They believe that history and human existence stand under God's concern.⁴ Humanity is not only the image of God; we are also "a perpetual concern of God."⁵

Of crucial importance in the prophetic understanding of history is the idea of God's passion ('pathos'). Divine pathos, Heschel asserts, is the "central category" in prophetic theology; "as central as the idea of man being the image of God is for the understanding of creation."⁶ It is through this central category that the prophets express their understanding of the reality of God in relation to human beings. God reveals Godself through pathos. He writes,

God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human action arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath.⁷

This notion that God can be intimately affected, that God possesses not merely intelligence and will but also pathos,

² ibid., p. 175ff.
³ ibid., p. 218.
⁴ ibid., p. 219.
⁵ ibid., p. 226.
⁶ ibid.
⁷ ibid., p. 224.
basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God. Pathos therefore becomes, for the prophets, the theological perspective by which they interpret all human events.

What does divine pathos mean? It denotes, not an idea but a living God who cares for people and loves the world; "not an immutable example, but ... a dynamic relation between God and man." It is not a 'passion' but an act formed with intention, rooted in God's free decision and determination. Pathos is not an absolute force which exists regardless of humanity, something ultimate or eternal. It is rather a "reaction to human history, an attitude called forth by human conduct; a response, not a cause."

In prophetic theology, Heschel finds no dichotomy of pathos and ethos, of motive and norm. Pathos and ethos involve and presuppose each other. Because God is the source of justice, God's pathos is ethical. And because God is absolutely personal - devoid of anything impersonal - God's ethos is full of pathos. Pathos therefore is not an attitude taken arbitrarily. Its inner law is the moral law; "ethos is inherent in pathos." Unlike the passion of the Greek gods which is always reflexive, that is, egotistic or self-centred, divine pathos is transitive. It is always directed outward.

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8 ibid.,

9 Heschel understands 'passion' to mean an agitation of the soul and mind devoid of reasoned purpose (eg. desire, anger, fear, joy, hatred etc); or generally those states of consciousness which are accompanied by pleasure or pain.

10 ibid., p. 225.

11 ibid.,
rather than inward; it always expresses a relation to human beings. It is never separated from history.

Pathos expresses the biblical truth that God has a stake in the human situation. That the predicament of humanity is the predicament of God. For Heschel, the essential meaning of pathos is, therefore, not to be seen in the psychological denotation, as standing for a state of the soul, but in its theological connotation, signifying "God as involved in history."\(^{12}\)

B. History & Humanity

By virtue of God's involvement with humanity, Koyama is led to an understanding of history in terms of human beings. By history is meant the real situation of human existence. It is to do with human reality; the actual business of experiencing one's historical life. It speaks about people in the actual process of 'living,' in all the complexities of human life. "We live in history. 'We live' means 'we experience history'."\(^{13}\) Of course all human beings live in history. No one is a-historical or trans-historical. One is human and remains to be human because one is rooted in history and participates in making history. But Koyama wishes to emphasise a basic truth about human existence, namely, human beings do not live in some abstract or general idea of

\(^{12}\) ibid., p. 226.

\(^{13}\) WBT, p. 23; See also, Kosuke Koyama, "Theology in the Time of Acute Complexity in History," SEAJT, Vol. 12 (1971), pp. 5-6.
history. They live in certain specific locations, each with its own peculiar history, culture, worldview, spirituality and so on. He writes,

To be a man means to live in a particular historical situation. Particular? Yes. We do not live in some general idea of history. We live in a certain locality and each locality has a history, culture and language.\(^{14}\)

History then has to do with human existence in the particularity and concreteness of time and space. It is the sum total of human interactions - political, economic, cultural, social, religious, etc., in a particular context.

Since human beings experience themselves as people in time and space, it follows that there are varieties of historical experiences. Thus a Japanese, Indian, Tongan, German, American or a Scot, by virtue of their particular historical situations, each experiences life differently from the other. Also, since each exists in history in a particular place at a particular time, each is influenced by and contributes something to that particular history. In other words, human beings by virtue of their participation in history, create and make history; at the same time, they are molded and shaped by history.

History for Koyama is essentially personal. His own personal experience plays a vital part in this understanding of history. Reflecting upon his own life in the history of Japan, Koyama claims that his experience of two different types of systems - the authoritarian imperial Japan prior and up to the end of the war in which he lived his first sixteen

\(^{14}\) WBT, p. 43.
years; and democratic post-war Japan in which he lived the next twenty six years of his life - has created two kinds of 'selves' in him; an "authoritarian self" and a "democratic self." 15 Out of this reflection he comes to the belief that the concepts of 'person' and 'history' are inseparable.

Although both concepts are difficult to grasp, it is quite obvious that "we cannot think of a 'person' except 'in history', nor can we speak of 'history' if persons are not present." 16 It is an empty word or a 'ghost concept' if it does not involve real people living in the present. For this reason Koyama describes history as a story of persons living as individuals and/or in communities. Unlike a fairy story like Cinderella or Snow White where the characters are imaginary, history is a "lived story," that is to say, "a true story of the world, a nation, a community and individuals - a story which always involves people." 17 And it is this 'living' that brings out meaningful thoughts for our present life experience."

Whilst popular understanding tends to see history as something to do with the 'past,' history for Koyama is also concerned about the present. This 'present' dimension is important because history can only be viewed from a present perspective; it can only be meaningful to present human beings. 18 The history of Japan, for example, has no meaning

15 50M, p. 56.
16 ibid., p. 57.
17 ibid., p. 104.
18 ibid.,
for a dead person.

Thus in Koyama's thinking, the historical and the personal, or, history and real human existence are linked together as opposite sides of the coin. The two are correlated.

C. The Complexity of History & Theology.

History is not a simple process. It is neither mechanical nor systematic, neither neat nor clean, but complicated. This is basically because the 'living persons' who participate in and create history are themselves complicated. In virtue of God's image in human beings, a 'living person,' says Koyama, is a "profound, amazing and mysterious" creature;\(^{19}\) "an unfathomable complexity."\(^{20}\) Hence just as a person is complicated, so is history. Conversely, just as history is complicated, so is human existence.\(^{21}\)

It is the realization and appreciation of the correlation between history and human existence which forms the point of new departure for Koyama's missionary and theological thinking. He writes,

\(^{19}\) WBT, p. 208.

\(^{20}\) ibid., p. 211.

\(^{21}\) ibid., p. 212.
As I began to appreciate the complexity of history, I began to see the hidden values of history. ... I realized ... the appreciation of the complexity of man and history had opened my eyes to a more meaningful appreciation of the love of God in history.\(^2^2\)

Koyama was led to a new missiological approach to the Gospel. Contrary to common belief during the last century about missiology as being just a matter of preaching the "simple Gospel to the uncomplicated heathens," Koyama claims that the missiology inherent in the Gospel is not just that. The complex historical processes of existence ought to be taken into serious consideration too in the effort to communicate the Gospel.

That is, rather than preaching simply for the sake of obedience to the Christian commission, the communicator ought to be consciously mindful of the existential reality of human beings being addressed with the gospel message. The missionary must not be concerned only simply with the 'content' of the Gospel but the 'context' as well. If the Gospel should be communicated and proclaimed in Asia, "the Gospel must share the travail of present acute complexity of history."\(^2^3\)

For Koyama, this requires a sensitivity towards people in the totality of their historical experience, and a conscious effort on the part of the missionary to bring the gospel to bear upon this historical reality. Thus the Asian historical experience of colonialism, neo-colonialism; the experience of poverty and suffering; the impact of technology

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\(^{2^2}\) ibid.,

\(^{2^3}\) "Theology in the Time of Acute Complexity in History," p. 5.
and modernization on traditional religious life; the challenge of Asian religions, worldviews, cultures etc., must all be taken into account. How Asians think and feel, their joys and sorrows, hopes and despairs, frustrations and aspirations are all valuable means for proclaiming the Gospel message. Such an approach is not invalid. It is called for by the fact that the Lord of the Gospel is the Lord of history. The God of the Bible is there in the complex situation of history and human existence.  

Appreciation of the complexity of history and human life also led Koyama to stress the importance of history in theological activity. Theology according to Koyama, is "an intelligent and spiritual reflection on history in its fundamental relationship to the Word of God." Theology lives in pointing to and speaking about Jesus Christ. It is concerned with this particular historical man. Looking at the Biblical faith itself, Koyama notes that one of its amazing threads is that God's saving acts are seen to be unfolded in the depth of the complexity of historical situations. In other words the complexity of history is the raw material in and through which God reveals God's intention to humankind through his prophets. Ultimately in the incarnation of the Word, God comes to live in a specific historical situation. History therefore is an important dimension for theology.

For Asian christians, history must belong to the primary theological concern. The "acute complexity of history" which

24 ibid.,

25 WBT, p. 106.
characterizes the reality of human existence in Asia at present must be given consideration with regard to the task of theology in Asia. The histories of Asia must be interpreted theologically. Human life in the particularity of Asian histories must be the primary concern of Asian theologians. Such a mandate is "given to us by the Incarnate One (the 'in-history' One, the 'in-culture' One). The acute historical complexity is a new dimension of challenge to theology in South East Asia today.

Koyama believes that as an Asian, his basic theological responsibility lies in the particular histories of Asia. This is the primary context of his theological interpretation of the Christian message. He can only begin his theology from within that context. Likewise, anyone engaged in theology must begin from one's particular historical context. Koyama asserts that there is no other way for doing theology but this. He calls it, "Particular Orbit Theology" (POT). Such an approach is appropriate because theological thinking 'cannot live outside the particularity of history' in the same way as one cannot live outside one's own family.

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26 An indication of what Koyama means by this is given in the first part of Waterbuffalo Theology under the heading 'Interpretation of History' (pp. 1-19). It begins with a kind of "theological travelogue" where Koyama raises a number of theological questions relating to the historical situations of Singapore, Thailand, China, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, Japan and Taiwan. In asking these questions, Koyama states that his primary intention is not to give answers but to highlight issues of theological import in the different Asian countries; issues which provide the raw materials for Asians to reflect upon in the light of the Christian faith.

27 WBT, p. 45.
One's particular history is the bed-rock of theological thinking. To engage in POT is, using Paul's words, to incorporate into theology "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just ..." (Phil. 4: 8f) in one's own history. And a theologian who fails to do this is like a "theological Frankenstein walking without his nose, ears and eyes." The resultant theology is unreal. For any theology which is not rooted in the aspirations and frustrations of the local people is an "a-historical docetic theology." Such a theology hangs in mid-air, so to speak; it fails to touch people at the grassroot level.

\[28 \text{ ibid.},\]

\[29 \text{ NHC, p. 34.}\]
The subject of 'Idolatry' is a major theme in Koyama's writings. In a number of earlier articles, we find the somewhat partial treatment of this subject, usually within the context of other themes. In his Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai, Koyama makes a comprehensive study of idolatry in the light of biblical faith in God. In this chapter, we shall examine this important theme in Koyama's thought, in relation to his view of God.

A. GOD:

1. Historical and Personal.

Koyama's understanding of God is intricately bound up with the prophetic view of history as expounded by Heschel. History as the arena of God's personal involvement with people provides the framework for reflecting upon the truth about God. History serves as the premise of theology.

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Theologically speaking means to speak of history primarily as the experience of God, rather than the experience of man. ... The meeting between 'man in history' (history-concerned man) and 'God in history' (history-concerned God) makes up the basic structure of 'theological speaking.'

As the quotation suggests, understanding of God is conceived in relational terms; God in relation to human beings. Thus talk about God (theology) cannot be divorced from talk about history.

For Koyama, the God of the bible is historical and personal. God's redemptive presence in the history of Israel demonstrates this clearly. God's personal engagement with the Israelites through the covenant reveals God as one who is 'decisively' and 'irreversibly attached' to human beings. The ultimate expression of this attachment is the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Perhaps the character of Koyama's God may be better appreciated when compared with some classic philosophical conceptions of God. Koyama understands God neither as a metaphysical idea in the manner of Plato's idea of the 'Good' nor a Supreme Being of absolute self-sufficiency,

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4 The idea of the Good was the God of Plato, and it was the meaning of the term "good" that determined his understanding of the concept of God. "The Good differs in nature from everything else in that the being who possesses it always and in all respects has the most perfect sufficiency and is never in need of any other thing." Quoted in Heschel, op. cit, p. 232.
such as Aristotle conceived God to be. God does not stand aloof from human affairs nor exist in complete detachment from the world, as some philosophical theologians maintain. Nor is God the God of the modern Deists whose conception of God's transcendence denies to God any personal relations with creation. God is furthermore not the Absolute Being whom the Epicureans and the Stoics held to be tranquil and impersonal—an apathetic monarch without passion, devoid of feeling and emotion.

Contrary to all these various conceptions, the God of the bible is a God of mercy. This is the heart of the gospel. God is One who is always deeply concerned for the welfare of the world and humanity, refusing to exist alone in abstraction, yearning for human fellowship and seeking for it in spite of human indifference. The God of the bible is one who is constantly 'in search' for human beings because of love. Refusing to be frustrated by human sinfulness, God "descends" to the world, addressing people personally and entering into

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5 Aristotle once said, "One who is self-sufficient can have no need of the service of others, nor of their affection, nor of social life, since he is capable of living alone. This especially is evident in the case of a god. Clearly, since he is in need of nothing, God cannot have need of friends, nor will he have any." Eudemian Ethics, VII, 1244b.


7 WBT, p. 95ff.


intimate relations with them. Thus in sum, the God of the bible is a 'living,' 'personal' God who 'cares' and feels for the world.

In reflecting upon Christian belief about God, one of Koyama’s favourite text is Hosea 11.8: "My mind is turning over inside me; my emotions are agitated all together." This verse expresses in a vivid and picturesque manner something of the mystery of the Christian God. Being 'agitated all together' points to an "impassioned God;" one who is emotionally involved in the experience of history. In the language of the Book of Exodus (20.5), the 'impassioned' God is one who is moved to anger or conciliation by human conduct through love and concern for the life of humanity. Such a God obviously is not an ideal God but personal.

2. Word of the Cross - Love.

The "God of pathos" (Heschel) is for Koyama, the God of love and mercy. Love constitutes the central message of the whole bible concerning the reality of the God. It expresses the mind of God in relation to humanity and history. In the language of Hosea, God's "mind keeps turning over and his emotions agitated" because of 'passion' and 'love' for the world. Love intimates to us the inner character of God in

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10 The verse is taken from the Anchor Commentary translation. Variant readings found elsewhere include: "My heart is turned within me, My compassion grows like a flame ..." (Hebrew Bible); "My heart recoils within me, My compassion grows warm and tender ..." (R.S.V.)

11 MFMS, p. 212.
dealing with humankind. It describes God's painful experience of history as made most clear in the crucifixion of Jesus. Koyama says, "The word of the cross points to God's agitated emotions because of God's love towards us."\(^{12}\) In other words, God's love for the world comes to its ultimate expression in Jesus' suffering on the cross. And for this reason the 'Word of the Cross' comes to be of fundamental importance in Koyama's thought. What is meant by the Word of the Cross?

First of all, the word of the cross is the 'Word of Creation.' "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," says St. John (1: 1). This means that the Word is no other than the God who created the world and rules over history and nature.\(^{13}\) The Word of the cross therefore signifies God as ground and source of human existence. The fact that 'In the beginning was the Word' means for Koyama, that "at the foundation of our life is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ."\(^{14}\) Jesus Christ, the Word of the Cross, was, is, and will forever be at the foundation of all humanity and of all things.

This Word which was in the beginning comes to us as the 'Word of Incarnation,' the 'Word of the cross' and the 'Word of Resurrection.' But these are not to be taken as three different Words. They are one and the same. This one Word is Jesus Christ the Lord. He is the incarnate lord, at once the

\(^{12}\) ibid., p. 241.

\(^{13}\) WBT, pp. 26-41.

\(^{14}\) Kosuke Koyama, "Three Theological Perspectives to 'Jesus Christ Frees and Unites'," NEAJT, no. 16 (March 1976), p. 39.
crucified and risen lord. Thus the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection cannot be isolated from each other. Each belongs to the same unity, the 'oneness' of the Word. For Koyama, this unity has important implications for the theological task of the Church. Since theology has to do with the living continuous story of Jesus Christ and how in this life God revealed God's self to us, we cannot have a 'compartmentalized' theology of incarnation, theology of Cross and theology of Resurrection."  

Secondly, the word of the cross is the word of 'unfathomable self-denial.' This is how the apostles interpreted the cross of Jesus. Apostolic witness says that Jesus' utter self-denial at the cross is motivated entirely by his love directed to humankind. And in this crucified Jesus, the apostolic church saw the glory of God. (cf. John 1: 14). The cross therefore is the ultimate expression of God's love to the world. By willingly giving himself up and by dying for others, Jesus revealed God's redemptive purpose for humanity. It is through Jesus' self-denial on the cross that the world gains the freedom to be once again united in fellowship with God. This is the truth of the Christian Gospel.

Now, if this is the way God reveals love to the world, then by implication, this is how the Church ought to conduct her mission in the world. Self-denial must also be the mode

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15 ibid., p. 39.

by which Christians live and act out their faith in relation to the world and neighbours. The words of Matthew. 16: 24, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" suggests this implication of the word of the cross most forcefully.

Thirdly, the word of the cross is the word of reconciliation. The Christian faith lives in believing in God’s decisive and irreversible ‘attachment’ with humanity in Christ. This is the redemptive truth of the Christian gospel which Paul and the Early Church believed. To reconcile the world to Godself, God has acted decisively in "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2.2). Likewise Koyama believes that ultimate reconciliation has been accomplished "by virtue of the sacrifice of the cross" of Jesus Christ, (cf. Col. 1. 20; Eph. 2. 13).

How does reconciliation come about? Upon the cross, Jesus Christ who believed in God was rejected and forsaken by God. ('My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' - Mark 15. 34). Despite his cry of agony and despair, God remained silent. Yet in spite of God’s silence, Jesus’ faith in God never wavered. At the very moment when God seem to have forsaken him, Jesus firmly trusted in God. This, according to Koyama, is a demonstration of ‘ultimate faith’ which in Luther’s words means not just fleeing to God, but "to flee to God against God."17 And this ultimate faith is the possibility of reconciliation. Reconciliation between God and unfaithful human beings is possible in Jesus because no one is ever so

17 MFMS, p. 247.
forsaken as Jesus was since no one is ever so close to God. This is what Koyama means when he says, "The one who was most alienated, condemned and forsaken became the fountain-head of reconciliation and so frees and unites." 18

Koyama's interpretation of Phil. 2. 1-11 yields the conclusion that Jesus is the author of reconciliation. The crucified Christ becomes the foundation of reconciliation by "decreasing himself to an incomprehensible degree" for the sake of sinful humanity. 19 He did not count equality with God as something to be grasped but completely emptied himself, taking human form and humbling himself in total obedience to God 'even unto death on the cross.' (Phil. 2. 6-9). But in the end, God raised him from the dead, exalting his name 'above every name on earth and under the earth.' For Koyama, this is a pointer to the fact that the estrangement of humanity from God by virtue of humanity's disobedience and unfaithfulness has now been set right. God and fallen humanity are reconciled by virtue of Jesus' death on the cross.

Finally, the word of the cross is the word that communicates. This means that the crucified Christ communicates most clearly to us the mind of God because it reveals the depth of the mystery of suffering. The word of the cross is nonsense if people are not committed to it fully, that is, if they do not believe and act upon it. But if we do, its power will help us understand our human situation and

18 "Three Theological Perspectives to 'Jesus Christ Frees and Unites'," p. 40.

19 WBT, p. 222.
enable us to relate better to God and others.

The word of the cross ... begins to illuminate human situations with tremendous force of communication between man and man (community) and between man and God (church) if we decide to live not superficially.²⁰

Koyama claims that Jesus, the one who is crucified is therefore most communicating, and the form of the crucified Lord is the ultimate form and passion of communication.

In Koyama’s theology, the cross stands as the centre symbol of the Christian faith. It stands for the "crucified God" (Moltmann) thus revealing most concretely the mind of God in dealing with the world. The cross ultimately reveals that God loves the sinful world so much that God allowed Godself to be crucified in order to redeem it. So great was this love of God that even "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The word of the cross therefore expresses the redemptive truth of the Christian faith, namely, 'God was in Christ personally reconciling the world to himself' (2. Cor. 5: 19).

Like Luther, Koyama sees that the only Christian faith is "agitated adhesion to God" in the Word of the cross; in nothing else "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (Gal. 3: 1 cf. Cor. 2: 2). The 'word of the cross' sums up the whole message of the Gospel.²¹ And for this reason, it serves as a theological perspective for identifying and judging the demonic forces which are destroying individual well-being and perpetuating misery and suffering among human beings.

²⁰ "Three Theological Perspectives to 'Jesus Christ Frees and Unites'," p. 40.

²¹ WBT, p. 226.
B. Idolatry.

Koyama recognizes idolatry as one of the most paralyzing and destructive forces in the world today. Idolatry really begins in the depth of the human heart. It is therefore a problem that is very much related to our faith and confidence in God. For this reason, an essential function of theology is to expose idolatry. And this is what Koyama undertakes in his *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*. A central image used in this attempt is that of the "broken" or "crucified Christ." This image is for him the main criterion in a critique of idolatry.

As a framework for a clearer conceptual image of the subject, Koyama adopts Tillich's definition:

> Idolatry is the elevation of a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially conditioned is taken as unconditional, something essentially partial is boosted into universality, and something essentially finite is given infinite significance.

This is then worked out with reference to contemporary issues, especially the modern history of Japan. For instance, in the religious tradition of Japan Koyama recognizes the presence of idolatry in its various forms: it misuses centre symbolism

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22 Koyama's interest in the subject of idolatry is rooted in his personal experience of imperial Japan and her destruction in 1945. That experience together with an awareness of the peril of nuclear war lead him to see idolatry as a destructive force which "threatens the survival of the human race upon this planet." MFMS, p. 241.

23 Koyama asserts that "it is the crucified Christ who exposes the subtle essence and manifestation of idolatry." MFMS, p. 261.

by divorcing it from social ethics and making all serve the selfish interests of the centre; it subordinates meaning to efficiency especially through modern technology; it leads a group on the path of destructive self-glorification; it believes 'might is right;' it boosts the finite to the infinite; it has a god that does not radically criticize his worshippers and who tries to save himself but not others.

1. Misuse of Centre Symbolism.

In the mountain cult of Fuji-ko, Mount Fuji was seen as the cosmological centre, the **axis mundi** or the meeting place between 'heaven and earth,' or divine and human. A symbol for the harmony of the universe. It was said to be the source of all good things, the 'foundation of the security of the nation and the brain of the whole earth.' Mount Fuji was thus venerated as god.

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25 MFMS, p. 89.
26 ibid., p. 129.
27 ibid., p. 175.
28 ibid., p. 196f.
29 ibid., p. 141.
30 Fuji-ko is the name of the Mount Fuji Devotional Association founded by Hasegawa Kakugyo (1541-1646). Kakugyo opened up the mountain for religious purposes, teaching that the god of Mount Fuji called Sengen Dainichi is the creator of all things, and that those who believe in this god will live a long and happy life.
31 ibid., p. 84.
32 ibid., p. 86.
Identified with God, salvation was thought to be attained by practising spiritual exercise on the mountain. Mount Fuji, Koyama explains, symbolizes the Japanese religious (and cultural) outlook which is "characterized by a confidence in the continuity of nature in spite of the pervasiveness of decay and death" as well as a belief in the continuity of God and nature.\(^{33}\)

Influenced greatly by the religious ideology of Mount Fuji, the imperial cult centred on emperor worship which came to being towards the end of the nineteenth century developed into a political ideology. And the Japanese people were forced to live under it for 50 years.\(^{34}\) At the hands of government leaders, this religious ideology was used as a political weapon for the glorification of Japan.

The whole national god-system placed Japan at the centre of the world. Whatever Japan did was thought to be the expression of the 'Mind of the Righteous Heaven.'\(^{35}\) She was seen to be the sole possessor of the truth. Anyone who doubted this was a traitor. Japanese interest was focused upon the glory of Japan. She was thought to be a sovereign nation; all other nations were unimportant and subordinate. Or rather, all other nations were destined to come under the rule of the divine and sovereign nation.

\(^{33}\) ibid., p. 12.

\(^{34}\) From 1895 (the year of victory over China) to 1945 (destruction of Hiroshima). Kosuke Koyama, "Tribal Gods or Universal God?," Missionalia, Vol. 10, no. 5 (November 1982), p. 106.

\(^{35}\) MFMS, p. 24.
The emperor became the centre symbol of that sovereignty. In his person, heaven and earth met. Hence the emperor became the centre of religious and cultural life. Regarded as a divine being, in the lineage of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, he was seen to be "beyond human, beyond history, beyond morality." He was the fountainhead of the people's life and activities. His 'August Will' was to be the basis of the nation's morality; loyalty and obedience was thus demanded from all subjects.

Loyalty and obedience to the emperor meant devotion and reverence, as well as being prepared willingly to sacrifice one's life for the emperor's sake. In sum, this meant that people's existence were for the sole purpose of serving the interests of the centre. The emperor therefore not only served as a symbol for the spiritual centre of the nation, he became identified with it. In other words he was God.

According to Koyama, this imperial cult of emperor worship is idolatrous because it misuses centre symbolism. Identifying the symbol with divine reality is idolatrous basically because it "defrauds God, denying him his proper honours and conferring them upon others," to use Tertullian's words. God, as the Bible reveals, is holy. This holiness constitutes God's uniqueness or unidentifiability with

36 ibid., p. 21.

anything or anybody.\textsuperscript{38} God and humanity are discontinuous. No individual, no nation or human culture can claim identity with God. To do this is to defraud God by denying that which is God's due. To confer to a person or nation characteristics that belong to God alone is idolatrous.

There is also in the cult of emperor worship, a self-righteous desire to boost the 'conditioned' to the 'unconditional,' the 'finite' into the 'infinite,' and the 'partial' into 'universality,' to use Tillich's words. But as soon as some sense of 'boosting symbol to the unconditional itself' takes place, a subtle process begins which in fact produces idolatry.\textsuperscript{39} The identification therefore of conditional and finite Japan with the unconditional and infinite God through the symbol of the emperor is a clear case of idolatry.

Misuse of centre symbolism takes place "when the symbol is invested with a power of its own" to control the destiny of human life.\textsuperscript{40} When the centre symbol, be it an individual person, community, ethnic group, nation or empire fail to acknowledge their limitation (sin, pride, arrogance, egocentric complex) and claim infallibility, it produces idolatry.\textsuperscript{41} Under the ideology of the imperial cult, the emperor was identified with the centre of salvation. In other

\textsuperscript{38} MFMS., p. 47.
\textsuperscript{39} ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{40} ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{41} ibid., p. 89.
words, he was not only a symbol of the centre, he was himself, salvation.42

Koyama is critical of this scheme, for, to fix salvation on the emperor suggests two things. The first is that human beings can manipulate God. It betrays a false belief that God can be 'handled' or domesticated. That god can be programed by human beings to fit their schemes of thought. Secondly, it suggests that the centre of salvation is static and immobile. That salvation is something restrained to the confines of Japan. How can a god who can be scheduled by people be a centre symbol for salvation?

The God of the bible is a holy God. And because of this holiness, God cannot be placed under any human power.43 No individual, no nation or culture can ever hope to domesticate or control God. Neither can God be arranged or manipulated for any human intention.44 Being the 'Holy One,' even the "heaven and the earth cannot contain" God. (1 Kings, 8:27). From the standpoint of biblical religion, God in Jesus symbolizes the centre of salvation. But this centre symbol is not a cosmologically fixed centre. This means that God cannot be fastened to any one place in history. Being holy and free God transcends all human boundaries.

42 What underlies this understanding of salvation is a circular view of history. An understanding of time and eternity as a property of 'heaven and earth' rather than God who is above the eternity of heaven and earth. In such a scheme of thought, God is fitted into a cosmological scheme of circularity. Salvation in such a scheme has a fixed centre. ibid., p. 90.

43 ibid., p. 36.

44 ibid., pp. 47-8.
The biblical concept of centre symbolism is dialectical, not static. This implies not only that salvation has its source in God, not in humans; but also that it can be found anywhere. Wherever God is, that place is the centre of salvation. Thus "if Jesus Christ goes to the periphery, the periphery, because of his presence, becomes the centre." According to Koyama, the presence of God in the 'crucified Christ' neutralizes our ordinary concept of centre. Not to be at the centre but to be with God is salvational.

Another example of misuse of centre symbolism is when the centre symbol is divorced from social ethical concerns. Again in the history of Japan, this is seen in the fact that the centre symbol of the imperial cult had no interest in questions of ethics and social justice. Japan symbolized by the emperor was less concerned for human well-being than with power and prestige; with enhancing her own glory. Interested in her own glorification, "it had no regard for the welfare of the Chinese, Koreans, Americans, Italians" let alone her own people. The wars waged by Japan on other nations in the

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45 ibid., p. 90. In the bible we find that God's presence with people is not a fixed but a mobile presence. In the history of Israel God is always present. Having descended on Mt Sinai and met the Israelites, God also travels with them to the promised land. (Exo. 19: 1 - 40: 38). In Jesus Christ, we see the mobile presence of God; the God who journeys with people and meets people at different places and in all critical events of people's history. The 'moving' God is there in the histories of all peoples, even those marginalized by society.

46 ibid., p. 252.

47 ibid., p. 88.

48 ibid., p. 24.
interest of the centre, without the people's willing consent led only to misery, despair, agony and eventually destruction for those outside of the centre. This shows that the path of self-glorification can only lead to self-destruction.

To Koyama this amounts to idolatry because the centre does not exist for the sake of its own glory but has a mission to benefit the periphery. In other words the centre exists for the sake of the periphery. God's address to Abraham, "... by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12.3) is a classical expression of this. Abraham is a centre symbol for the history of salvation. But Abraham at the centre is there for the sake of all families of the earth. That is, his centrality is not to be privatized. It is, as it were, a social property.

Jesus himself as centre of the biblical faith, establishes his centrality by going to the periphery (cross). He becomes the Lord by being crucified. At the periphery he demonstrates his love and concern for all humanity by accepting death on the cross. The periphery (cross) therefore is not a forsaken place. It is where salvation takes place. It is the place where God in Christ embraces the self-centred humanity and out of this divine embrace, through the mystery of grace, humanity broken up by idolatry finds healing. For Koyama, the broken Christ heals the broken world, not by ruling from the centre but by going to the periphery and thereby giving a new concept of centre symbolism.

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49 ibid., p. 94.

50 MFMS, p. 243.
2. Idolatry as worship of Parochial god.

Koyama claims that the centre symbol of the imperial cult of Japan, by virtue of its indifference to matters of social justice and the common good of humanity represents a "tribal" or "parochial" god, a god concerned only with the glory of its own tribe. Such a god has no international experience. It cannot speak any language other than Japanese. Worship of such a god leads to national ruin because it only evokes militarism and racism. It leads to division among peoples.\(^{51}\)

The presence of this parochial god is certainly not confined to the emperor worship of Japan. The world in fact is full of parochial gods. Koyama sees manifestation of it in the political and economic relation between First World nations and under-developed nations. It is evident in the drive for power expressed in the arms race and the monopolization of world resources by industrial nations. Also in relation to the impact of Technology on traditional spiritualities, particularly the mistaken belief in technology and science as having the final say in matter of human destiny, Koyama recognizes the face of this tribal god. It is even apparent in some theologies which claim to be Christian.

The main characteristic of this kind of god is that it does not make critical comments against its own tribe. It always says 'okay, okay' or 'peace, peace!' when there is no

\(^{51}\) "Tribal Gods or Universal God?" p. 106. Koyama believes that Japanese national devotion to its parochial god led to its destruction.
peace. (Jer. 6: 14). The three forms in which this "convenient" or approving god usually comes correspond to three prevalent types of theology. The first is that which resembles a western movie where the good and the bad guys are clearly presented and the audience uncritically identifies with the good.\textsuperscript{52} Koyama calls it 'Western Movie Theology.'

This type of theology puts people into two neat sections—good and bad, godly and ungodly—and tells us "we" are the good people. Obviously the god of this type of theology is one which creates division among the human family. Such a god elicits two kinds of reactions from its devotees: one, either we become dull and gullible in our spiritual and mental perception, or two, we proclaim ourselves "godly" soldiers of crusade against the ungodly.

A second manifestation of the 'tribal god' is found in the uncritical equation of success with faith in God. Koyama calls it "God follows Success Theology."\textsuperscript{53} In this kind of theology, God is placed within the scheme of human success. God stands with the successful, in business, religion, political power and popularity. A third type is what Koyama calls "fabricated holiness theology." In the name of the tribal god, the ideology supporting it is able to fabricate the 'holy.' In the Bible, such fabricated holiness is called a 'graven image' or 'idol.'

\textsuperscript{52} ibid. p. 107.

\textsuperscript{53} When Japan took over Manchuria and Korea and invaded China successfully, it was seen as the endorsement of the tribal god. ibid., 107.
In contrast to the tribal god, the "universal God" of the bible is not uncritical of His own people. Unlike the approving, 'okay okay-saying' tribal god, the universal God reprimands and judges those who are unconcerned with the good of all. This God condemns the human self-righteousness which destroys the human family by making arbitrary divisions on the basis of self-centred evaluation. Thus the western-movie type of theology which classifies people into sections is an insult both to the universal God and humanity. Such theology is an affront rooted in self-deception or 'parochialism.' Koyama writes:

We deceive ourselves when we differentiate people according to various ways and thinking that we, by virtue of our being of a particular faith or ideology, are automatically better or morally superior.  

This self-deception which uses the name of God to confirm it is self-righteousness. It is the root of all forms of idolatry.  

54 ibid. p. 108.

55 Another term Koyama often uses interchangeably with self-righteousness is 'parochialism.' He defines this term basically as a geographical concept meaning that one's view of reality is limited to the confines of one's own parish. But its serious meaning appears when it is understood in its spiritual and intellectual implications. MFMS, pp. 23-24. Refer also, "Christianity Suffers from 'Teacher Complex'", in Mission Trends, No. 2: Evangelization, eds., Gerald H. Anderson & Thomas F. Stranksy C.S.P. (New York: Paulist, 1975), pp. 70-5.

56 Self-righteousness in many areas of life - politics, religions, cultures, race relations - derives from the separation of faith from ethics; from the divorce between eusebeia and dikaiosune. Self-righteousness, says Koyama is idolatrous. "Christ at the Periphery," The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 34, No. 1, (January 1982) p. 69.
spheres of human behaviour: in education, politics, economics, international relations and military preparation. Not only is self-righteousness arrogant and selfish, it is divisive and unbiblical. Koyama demonstrates this with the Apartheid policy of the South African rulers.  

Real self-righteousness in the biblical prophetic tradition is determined by our 'openness of spirit' and 'freedom' to "walk humbly with God," and not to tackle the world from a position of power. So only in this powerful prophetic direction can we move toward communion instead of fragmentation in the human family.  

The universal God of the bible challenges the tribal god expressed by the theology which identifies success with God and puts exclusive emphasis on the 'victorious Christ.' The universal God does this by viewing success not in terms of strength and power but in weakness and suffering out of love.

The true meaning of success in the bible, Koyama asserts, is seen in the way Jesus accepted and faced the cross with all its mockery and shame. He allowed himself to die on the cross because of his love for the world. This is why "he cannot save himself." So unlike the tribal god which tries to save himself when the going gets rough; unlike the tribal god which operates from a position of power, believing that 'might is right,' the universal God of the bible negotiates with the world from a position of weakness, through the "crucified

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58 Koyama, "Tribal Gods or Universal God?" p. 109.
Christ." He allows himself to suffer for the sake of others.\textsuperscript{59}

As we mentioned earlier, the image of the 'crucified Christ' or 'broken Christ' is at the centre of Koyama's discussion of idolatry. In his view, this is the criterion by which the idolatry that is breaking up the world today can be identified and judged. In the conclusion of his work, he states, "it is the crucified Christ who exposes the subtle essence and manifestation of idolatry."\textsuperscript{60}

C. 'Crucified Mind.'

The spirituality that accompanies this understanding is best summed up in Koyama's essays "Toward a Crucified Mind" and "Three Modes of Christian Presence."\textsuperscript{61} Using the image of a 'crucified mind' Koyama suggests that this must characterize the mind of the Christian Church in her task of communicating the christian message and confessing her faith in the world. In other words, the mission of the Church must be fashioned after the mind of the 'crucified Christ.'

The christian message focuses on the passionate God who is present in the history of humankind. The God who participates in the history of "dead-alive/lost-found,"\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{59} ibid., pp. 110-111.

\textsuperscript{60} MFMS, p. 261.

\textsuperscript{61} WBT, pp. 209-238.

\textsuperscript{62} WBT, p. 215: Koyama sees in the parable of the Two Sons a summary of God's experience of history. The history that God is involved in is full of 'dead-alive' / 'lost-found'
because of love for the world. Ultimately in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God becomes present among people in history. There God’s love becomes actually present in human form. This presence of God, Koyama asserts, is not a general but a specific presence.

He visits us in our specific time and place of complexity. Love is the mind that tries to understand specific needs of this man and that man, this community and that community. That ‘God is love’ is not a general statement applicable to the general overall situation. He is specifically love.63

This is the saving truth of God that the Christian Church has to communicate. God is present in China as well as England. God loves all people equally; Japanese and Jews, Buddhists and Christians, etc. But the problem for Koyama is how to communicate this truth most effectively. In the context of Asia for instance, where starvation, poverty, suffering, political crises, bloodshed, etc form the reality of human existence, how does the Christian church communicate the reality of God, in terms of ‘life, history, hope and love’ to real living neighbours who are in the midst of human and historical complexities?

The answer to this important question, Koyama thinks, lies not in the process of communication but in the person of the communicator himself. The message of the gospel can be most meaningful to others if the message is incarnated in the human beings. God comes to emancipate the world from death, loss, etc.

63 ibid., p. 215.
messenger and produces, as it were, "a messageful person."\(^{64}\) Here Koyama has in mind the life of the prophets who, as communicators of God's love, internalized the word of God, thus enabling God to speak to the nations through them.

Such communication is not at all an armchair affair but a calamitous assignment which demands active involvement and service. It is a difficult and costly business because it requires the communicator—in the conviction that the 'Lord God helps me' (Jer. 50:7)—to accept rejection and humiliation. It requires the communicator to identify with the 'refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things' as the apostle Paul did. To be a communicator is not a part time job. It requires tremendous spiritual energy and total commitment; that is, it requires all of man's life.\(^{65}\)

The 'crucified mind' therefore, sums up what Koyama means by being a communicator of the love of God for the world, that is the mission of the Church. The crucified mind defines the essential nature of what it means to be a missionary, in the broad sense of missionary as one who is "missioned" by God to participate in the concretization of God's love in history.\(^{66}\) Since God 'missions' all people, since "God uses man in all his complexity ... lets man participate in his

\(^{64}\) ibid., p. 216.

\(^{65}\) ibid., p. 218.

\(^{66}\) Koyama understands the 'concretization' of God's love in the world in practical terms. The church through its members can bring God's love meaningfully to real people (neighbours) through concrete action and service. For example, government health officers spraying DDT to eradicate malaria mosquitoes in a remote Thai village is seen as "one concretization of the love of God." WBT, p. 220.
purpose in history" amidst all historical and human complexity, every Christian is therefore seen to be a missionary.\textsuperscript{67} And as a missionary, one ought to display in one's life the mind of Christ crucified. What does this mean?

The essence of Christ's mind is his love for others. Out of this love constantly flows a willingness to give up his 'right of way' for the sake of others. That is, a readiness to put himself down, so to speak, in order for others to benefit. Using the Johannine principle of, "He must increase, but I must decrease," Koyama demonstrates how Christ let himself decrease to an incomprehensible degree in order for the world to increase. (c.f. 2 Cor. 8: 9; Phil. 2: 1-11). Christ allowed himself to be crucified on the cross in order for humankind to be reconciled with God. This is the essence of the crucified mind.

It is the mind open to give. It is the mind that does not seek profit for itself. It is the mind which is happy in becoming refuse (decrease) of humanity since it will bring increase to others. ... It is a mind of self-denial based on Christ's self-denial.\textsuperscript{68}

Koyama contrasts this crucified mind with the 'crusading mind' which he thinks is so often characteristic of Christian mission in Asia. This crusading mind is displayed in the missionary belief that Christianity is the only true and genuine religion, and all others are misguided, false and perverted. Such a mind, argues Koyama, is self-righteous and arrogant. It suffers from what he calls a "teacher-complex"

\textsuperscript{67} ibid., p. 219.

\textsuperscript{68} ibid., p. 223.
or crusade complex. That is, it is more interested in teaching people but not interested in being taught. It is concerned more with 'speaking' to people but does not 'listen' to them. This crusading mind only makes Christianity into a self-asserting, "one-way-traffic" religion concerned only for her 'self.'

Unlike this crusading mind, Christ's mind is "intensely two-way." This means giving up one's right-of-way for the sake of others. The crusading mind often has the objective of self-increase, but the crucified mind is a mind of love seeking benefit for others. It is the mind which sees others 'as he is seen' (1 John 4: 20). Unlike the crusading mind which "bulldozes people and history without appreciation of their complexities" the crucified mind appreciates the complexity of man and history, and participates in this very complexity as Christ did in all the complexity of human existence and history.

Koyama claims that the mind of Christ crucified provides the model for all communicators of the christian Gospel. And only through such a crucified mind can the truth of God be truly communicated to others. Besides being the model for communicating and confessing the truth of the christian gospel, the crucified Christ also defines the mode of christian presence in the world. That is, Christian identity or, Christian living is now established on the crucified Lord.

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70 WBT, p. 223.
What does this mean? It means that Christian presence which is rooted in and participates in the crucified Christ, must demonstrate the quality of Christ's glory in suffering, his exaltation in rejection.\textsuperscript{71} Here Koyama suggests three modes of Christian presence:

1. Stumbling presence

According to Koyama, the rejected and crucified lordship is the scandal of the cross: "Crucified, yet Christ is sovereign over all (the King); Crucified, yet Christ comforts all (the Priest); Crucified, yet Christ frees all (the Prophet)."\textsuperscript{72} The scandal of the cross is a stumbling block to many people. But this stumbling block is the mystery of God which shakes and disturbs all, including Christians. "Christian presence is firmly established upon the glory of the crucified Christ, yet at the same time, this very glory shakes our presence and makes it a stumbling one."\textsuperscript{73} In Koyama's view, only in remaining stumbling agents can Christians hope to bear witness to the mystery of God at the cross which shakes the foundation of human life. "Can a house unshaken bear witness to the earthquake which is going on?"\textsuperscript{74} In other words, by remaining stumbling agents, Christians can

\textsuperscript{71} ibid., p. 228.
\textsuperscript{72} ibid., p. 227.
\textsuperscript{73} ibid., p. 231.
\textsuperscript{74} ibid., p. 229.
assert Christ’s lordship of ‘holding all things together’ in the stumbling world today.

Furthermore, the stumbling presence of Christians guards them against what Koyama calls the "superficial triumphalism of faith" which encourages a quick jump from ‘stumbling’ to ‘un-stumbling’.\(^{75}\) What Koyama means by this is an over-emphasis on ‘theologia gloriae’ which has so often characterized the theology of the Christian church. The danger of triumphalism is that it clouds our eyes from viewing the nailed Lord. And by focusing upon the glory of Christ alone, we present an unbalanced picture of the redemptive truth of the Christian faith.

The scandal of the cross makes Christians stumbling too. And in remaining stumbling, they are in a better position to communicate "why" they are stumbling to their neighbours.

2. Dis-comforted Presence.

Christians are comforted people by virtue of belonging to Jesus Christ. But it is precisely because of this specific belonging that we are Christologically dis-comforted. Christians are called to share in the painful pathos of God’s saving will expressed in the cross of the crucified Jesus. According to Koyama, to live in this peculiar paradoxical framework is the Christian mission to the world. It is a prophetic style of life.

\(^{75}\) ibid., p. 231.
With reference to the Asian context, the christologically dis-comforted presence means two things: First, it means reflecting in "our" discomfort, the nature of Christ's "discomfort," that is, his death on the cross. It means participating in the suffering of Christ not by taking a contemplative stance but by active participation in the reality of the world. Christological discomfort means, "participating in the suffering of our neighbours, just as Christ died for his neighbours." 76

Second, dis-comforted presence means, sharing with our neighbours the Christological comfort through our Christological discomfort, not through philosophical advice or theological formulations.

The realism of Christ's comfort and the comfort of our human doctrinal statements, no matter how accurate and profound they may be, cannot be treated on an equal footing. Doctrinal persuasion is a falsely comfortable way to come to the hearts of our neighbours. 77

For Koyama, the comfort of Christ is one which comes from his discomfoting involvement with the living people. Christ's comfort emanates from his experience of dis-comfort on the cross on account of the world. If this is so, then Christ's discomfort must also be the source of comfort for Christians. By rooting our comfort in the discomfort of Christ, we have a better chance of sharing Christ's comfort with the world. "Can Christians who do not involve themselves in the great

76 ibid., p. 233.
77 ibid., p. 234.
'discomfort' of the nailed Christ point to the source of all comfort?"^78

3. Un-free Presence.:

Christ frees us from the power of darkness. Christ has the power to emancipate the world from all 'principalities and earthly powers'. When Christ touches humanity, and humanity is led to touch him in faith - even the "fringe of his cloak" (Matt. 9: 20-22) - humanity is restored to wholeness, to the abundant life in the covenant relationship with God. Christ therefore is the source of human freedom. This is a fundamental conviction of the christian faith. However when Christian freedom is viewed in the light of the crucified Christ, then our freedom becomes paradoxically "unfree". This, says Koyama must characterize christian presence in the world.

Should not this freedom be crucified following the Son of God who crucified his freedom for the others in the form of a servant? Can our freedom express itself in any other way than the life of 'unfreedom' of the servant?^79

Following Luther in his exposition of 'theologia crucis,' Koyama understands Christ's crucified lordship in terms of servantship. Christ's freedom took the form of a servant's freedom. It is freedom to serve others. In this sense, Christ's freedom must be seen in terms of the 'unfreedom' associated with the life of a servant. His crucified lordship is put into action through 'servantship.' If this is so, then

^79 ibid., p. 236.
Christian presence in the world must move between two points: 'freedom' from the elemental principals of this world, and, 'unfreedom' in the form of servant to serve all. Christian 'un-free presence' therefore means for Koyama, that Christians are called to participate in all situations of life as the Incarnate Lord fully did. \textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{80} ibid., p. 225.
The relationship of Christianity to Buddhism is a theme which Koyama has treated mainly in relation to Thailand and Japan. Through his personal experience of Thailand, for instance, he comes to realize how deeply Buddhist religious truths have influenced the life and thought of Thai people. He finds that the spirit of Buddhism has permeated Thai society so profusely that even after contacts with the West, Buddhism has continued to thrive, commanding profound respect and reverence from 93.4 percent of the population.\(^1\) It is true that the onslaught of modernization and technology on traditional culture has caused revolutionary changes in many areas of life including religion, but despite all that, the cultural and spiritual ethos of Thailand remains "essentially Buddhist."\(^2\)

The same thing can be said of Southeast Asia in general. "Inherited religion is historically there among the Asian

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\(^1\) Koyama locates the first contact between S.E.Asia and the West in the arrival of Vasco da Gama at Calicut in 1488. Followed by Alphonso d'Albuquerque in 1511 and later by Portuguese Dominican priests, these early contacts facilitated the advent of Western scientific ethos, political philosophy and Christianity. Of particular importance in this meeting of the East and West is the concomitant arrival of the "Lord's controversy" which Koyama describes in terms of Israel's radically different view of history. This new theology of history has shaken the foundation of traditional Asian spirituality and contributed to revolutionary social changes in Asia. See, Kosuke Koyama, "THAILAND: Points of Theological Friction," in Asian Voices in Christian Theology, ed., Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), pp. 65-86.

\(^2\) ibid., p. 72.
peoples as a revered tutor of spirituality."³ Contrary to the view of some early missionaries that Buddhism would soon pass out of the thoughts of millions of Asians, the fact is that Buddhism is here to stay.⁴ As an intrinsic part of the people's total make-up, it has become the principal force shaping and moulding human existence. It is a way of life.

It seems apparent that the realization of this truth about Buddhism gives rise to Koyama's concerns regarding the missiological and theological task of the Church in Asia. It is implied that if Christianity hopes to make any significant impact on Asians, Buddhism would have to be seriously considered and not lightly discarded as has often been the case. Obviously this would require an attempt on the part of christians to understand Buddhist beliefs and teachings and how these affect peoples's view of God, humanity and history. It calls for an attempt to identify theological points of convergence and divergence between Christianity and Buddhism.

Regarding christian mission, how is this to be conducted in this overwhelmingly Buddhist situation? What kind of attitude should the church adopt in relation to Buddhists? Does the christian church remain true to her calling by the 'crucified Lord' by taking a militating stance against Buddhism? By viewing evangelism in terms of an 'offensive'?⁵

³ ibid.,
⁴ Koyama himself admits to having once subscribed to that missionary view. See, WBT, p. 129.
⁵ NHC, p. 102
Given the nature and theological climate of the Asian context, how should Christians articulate the message of the Christian gospel? How is the content of the gospel to be expressed in order that its redemptive meaning may penetrate into the hearts of the people? How do we bring the truth of the gospel to encounter the Buddhist truths by which people live? What principles may be used in theological reflection upon the Christian faith in order that the gospel message may be conveyed meaningfully to Buddhists?

The questions are many. However, in the light of Koyama's concerns, they can be subsumed under two basic formulations: One, what is the relation of traditional religions, Buddhism in particular, to Christianity? Two, how is the mission of the Christian church to be conducted in the context of Asian history and Buddhist spirituality?

What follows is an attempt to examine how Koyama understands the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, and what this relationship entails in terms of the Church's approach to her theological and missionary task in Asia. Some explanation of the basic tenets of Buddhist beliefs would seem to be a good starting point here.
A. Buddhist Beliefs.

An understanding of the doctrine of "Conditional Arising"^6 is crucial for an understanding of Koyama's discussion of Buddhism. Koyama considers it to be the "core of the Buddha's gospel."^7 To understand this doctrine, one needs to consider firstly four fundamental marks of Buddhism:

(i) **Anicca** = All things are changeable and transient. In Buddhist philosophy, there is no such thing as an independent, imperishable substance. Everything exists in a state of constant flux. Life is a continuous cycle of becoming and being.^8 (ii) **Anatta** = All is no-self. Anatta means the unreality of the self (atman). It is the quality of insubstantiality, that is, having no true self-nature or having no continuing identity.^9 (iii) **Dukkha** = All is suffering. Dukkha means evil, suffering, sin, imperfection and unsatisfactoriness. (iv) **Nirvana** is tranquillity. This is the description of the ideal state in contrast to 'all is suffering.' Nirvana is the highest good, perfect salvation.

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^7 ibid., p. 114.

^8 The oft-quoted image of the Buddhist "wheel" is symbolical of this continuous cycle of birth and rebirth.

^9 MFMS, ibid. Buddhist anthropology believes all things exist only as interactions with others, and there is no independent substance that exists by itself. Human beings are seen as an aggregate of five elements: body, feeling, recognition, imagination and discrimination. There is no substantial 'I' then, there is only Five Aggregates ever in mutual interaction.
Now the first two of the marks of Buddhism speak about the fundamental way in which the Buddhist looks at the world, the last two are concerned about the contrasting values, dukkha and nirvana.

The doctrine of Conditional Arising is a religious formulation which lends an answer to the most fundamental question of the founder of the Buddhist religion, 'Why is there suffering in the world?' In the teachings of the Buddha, human existence is seen as a "mass of suffering" arising out of a twelve-linked chain of causes and effects.\(^{10}\)

This answer to the vexing problem of human existence is condensed into what is known as the "Four Noble Truths."\(^{11}\)

The first two Truths describe the Buddha's diagnosis of the

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\(^{10}\) These are: (1) ignorance, (2) predispositions, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form, (5) senses and mind, (6) contact with other selves and things, (7) sensations, (8) desire or craving, (9) Clinging or Grasping to existence, (10) Becoming or Rebirth, (11) old age, death, (12) suffering, grief, lamentation, sorrow, despair. The reasoning goes like this: The most fundamental cause of the painful coming-into-being of every individual is ignorance of anicca (impermanence of the world) and anatta (unreality of the self). This basic fault, carried over from the previous life, is built into the original set or bent of the personality—predispositions (samskharas)—from birth. Thus predisposed, the personality becomes conscious of the world and itself. This in turn determines the distinctive traits one has, i.e. name and form of the individual. Individuality expresses itself causally in a particular exercise of the five senses and the mind. These in turn make contact with other selves and with things. Thence arises sensations which cause desire or craving (tanha). From craving comes clinging to existence. Clinging to existence entails the process of becoming. Becoming brings on a new state of being not like the one preceding it. Finally, such a new birth inevitably entails its own old age and death, grief, lamentation, dejection and despair. Such is the origination of this whole mass of human suffering.

\(^{11}\) For each of the Four Truths as quoted below, refer John B. Noss, op. cit., p. 119.
predicament of humanity. The First Truth tells us how fundamental and inescapable is the reality of suffering in human life.

This, O Bhikkus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering. Presence of objects we hate is suffering; separation from objects we love is suffering; not to obtain what we desire is suffering. Briefly, the fivefold clinging to existence [by means of the five skandhas] is suffering.

The second Truth goes beyond the plain description of suffering to the investigation of the cause of suffering, namely, craving for existence and chasing after that which is unreal, changeable, impermanent and of no substance.

This, O Bhikkus, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering: Thirst, that leads to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there. (This thirst is threefold) namely, thirst for pleasure, thirst for existence, thirst for prosperity.

The Third and Fourth Truths are concerned about salvation. The third truth describes the method by which suffering can be removed, namely the eradication of thirst for existence.

This, O Bhikkus, is the noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: (it ceases with) the complete cessation of this thirst - a cessation which consists in the absence of every passion, - with the abandoning of this thirst, with the doing away with it, with the deliverance from it, with the destruction of desire.

Finally the Fourth Truth describes the eight-fold path by which complete deliverance from suffering may be attained. When suffering ceases, the ideal state of Nirvana is reached.

This, O Bhikkus, is the Noble Truth of the Path which leads to the cessation of suffering: that holy eight-fold Path, that is to say, Right Belief, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Endeavour, Right Mindfulness, Right Meditation.
These Four Noble Truths constitute the heart of the Buddhist doctrines and life. Koyama states,

No one can become a Buddhist unless he is committed to this particular formulation of the primary truth of dukkha, and is at least sincerely trying to realize these Four Noble Truths in his life.\textsuperscript{12}

For the Buddhist, the realization that all human existence is dukkha is the beginning of the religious life.\textsuperscript{13} As long as human beings are bound up in the cycle of birth and rebirth, suffering and pain will remain. Therefore the aim of the religious life is to escape from this "wheel" of existence. Freedom from existence (suffering) - this is the ultimate goal of every believer. Once this bondage to existence is broken, then Nirvana is realized. This is salvation, a state of being characterized by bliss and tranquillity. It is a state of being where the human and the divine are indistinguishable, "a state of being with everlasting smiles with nobody smiling."\textsuperscript{14}

From this account, the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Christianity are obvious. Basically, Buddhism is a religion of self-enlightenment where salvation is regarded as a matter of human achievement. In contrast, Christianity is a faith-religion; salvation is given and can be appropriated in faith.\textsuperscript{15} While Christianity begins with belief in God whose self-revelation takes place in history.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} WBT, p. 118.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} MFMS, p. 115.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} ibid., p. 130.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} ibid., p. 113
\end{itemize}
through Jesus Christ, Buddhism begins with human self-understanding (Buddha's) based on observation of the laws of nature. Contrary to the personal God of Christianity, Buddhist conception of God is highly impersonal.

Certainly Buddhism and Christianity differ from each other almost on all major categories of religion, but the one that Koyama emphasizes much more is the interpretation of history. On this point Koyama sees the fundamental contrast between the two religions. While Buddhism sees history in terms of human suffering, Christianity interprets history in terms of God's redemptive purpose for humanity. Thus the orientation of the former tends to be directed 'away from' history (detachment) while the direction of the latter is 'towards' history.

Now these points of divergence between Buddhist and Christian beliefs raise fundamental questions concerning the relation of Buddhism to Christianity. Is there a theological connection between the two histories? Christianity is an intensely historical religion. God is believed to be deeply attached to history, ruling and acting for the redemption of humankind. This historical dimension forms the foundation of the Christian faith. Take 'history' away and the foundation of the faith disintegrates. How can this truth be brought to bear on Buddhists who view the whole of existence and history as illusory and unreal? How does one proclaim the Gospel message of God's gracious attachment to humanity in a land given over to Buddha's gospel of 'detachment'?

\footnote{WBT, p. 153.}
B. The Historical God of Christianity Embraces All People.

The fundamental way by which Koyama attempts to bring the Christian faith to encounter Buddhism is by taking the histories of Asia as the starting point for theological reflection upon the truth of the faith. Koyama takes history as the theological framework for interpreting Christian relations with Asian religions. From a historical perspective, the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity is brought into the light of the Christian gospel.

One of the truths of the Christian faith is that God's saving acts are seen to be unfolded in the depth of historical existence. History is the arena where God's 'ultimate concern' is worked out in entanglement with human destiny. Two important insights derive from this. First, history is neither absurd nor blind. In virtue of God's participation in history, history has redemptive meaning for humanity. Possibilities for salvation are there in history.

Second all history, Asian history included, as part of divine experience is replete with theological meaning. This means that Asian histories are capable of manifesting the truth of the Christian God. Or God is present in the histories of Asia. In this respect Buddhism cannot be totally written off as a contradiction to Christianity.

Now since the christian faith is founded on God's historical engagement with the world, Christianity must therefore demonstrate this in its life and thought. Its theology and ministry must reflect and show this truth that
the 'finger of God' (Luke 11.20) is also at work in the history of Asian people.\(^{17}\) Christians ought to be capable of respect and appreciation for what is good and honorable in it Asian religions in the light of the history-concerned God of the Bible.\(^{18}\)

Koyama's own experience in Asia leads him to believe that Christians seem to be neither concerned about history nor trying to understand what 'the faith rooted in history' means.\(^{19}\) He claims that this is a fundamental weakness of Christian theology and ministry in Asia. For, by failing to demonstrate a genuine concern for Asian cultures and religions, and without showing a clear theological understanding of the historical basis of her faith, Christianity is simply a dead religion, devoid of any redemptive meaning and incapable of commending itself to Asian people.\(^{20}\)

As we pointed out earlier, history to Koyama is fundamentally a living story, not a theory as the western mind especially tends to think. This understanding of history is based on a biblical view of God, who is a 'story-God, not a theory-God.' Koyama points out that Asia has its history (story). And this history remains a story so long as it is not carried around by a handle.

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\(^{17}\) NHC, p. 69.

\(^{18}\) ibid., p. 79.

\(^{19}\) ibid., p. 99.

\(^{20}\) ibid., p. 100.
Yet in the history of Christian mission in Asia, he claims Christianity has often put a handle to it and tried to carry it around at will. How? By treating the history of Asia not as a story but as a theory. Regarding Asian history as a matter of no theological significance, Christianity has by and large shown little respect for the peoples, cultures and religions of Asia. Possessed by a theory-mind ('wise,' 'strong,' 'resourceful' and 'efficient') that is competent to 'handle' mission situations and having all the 'correct' answers regarding matters of religion and faith, Christianity has not really listened to the stories of the people. Suffering from a 'teacher-complex,' Christianity wants only to teach but not to learn from the people. Because the theory-mind is inspired by the idea of a 'comprehensive-obvious' God, it usually produces what Koyama calls "passive-answer theology." This kind of theology fails to appreciate and understand the respective beauty and religious truths of Asian cultures and religions. Conceiving itself to be the only genuine and true religion, Christianity refuses to acknowledge and appreciate the truths found in other Asian religions. Rather than approaching the histories and religions of Asia with a 'crucified mind'—which is the mind of the history-concerned God of the Bible—Christianity has approached Asian histories with a 'crusading mind.' Koyama asserts that such failure to show 'respect' to history means that in the eyes of Asians,

21 ibid., p. 100f
22 ibid. p. 71.
Christianity has become superficially historical.\textsuperscript{23} That is, it is 'historical' only in theory but not in practice.

This 'theory-minded' Christian treatment of Asian histories has had devastating effects on Asian peoples, as well as the mission of the Christian church itself. With regard to the people of Asia, Koyama cites the so-called 'domino theory'\textsuperscript{24} by which Asian history was interpreted by Western nations and which resulted only in a "pervasive corruption, brutal exploitation of the people, outright denial of human rights, successive emergence of totalitarian government, controlled education" in South East Asian capitals.\textsuperscript{25}

Furthermore, traditional experience with time, family, language and education is radically disrupted and confused. Time, once experienced essentially as a shared communal property, with a sense of continuity of communal fellowship, is now understood in terms of business achievement. It is now monopolized as a private business property. The primary value of the family as the source of security, fellowship, encouragement, happiness, and spirituality has been invaded by the foreign value of money. Cash relationship is replacing personal relationship in Asian society today. Language, once the right of the people for expressing themselves freely has often become brutally controlled by government leaders. Education, once a process of personality formation, has now

\textsuperscript{23} ibid., p. 109.

\textsuperscript{24} ibid., p. 99.

\textsuperscript{25} ibid.,
become a tool for 'self-aggrandizement.' At these critical points, people's life is disrupted. Losing their 'shalom,' they feel injured and confused. Koyama asserts that these historical crises which Asian people are experiencing today, have come about because some humans, (meaning Westerners as well as Asians) have 'handled' history brutally.\(^\text{26}\)

Regarding the mission of the church itself, Koyama points to certain Western mission theories that have been used to mould the Asian Christian experience, asking Asians to depart from their own historical and cultural contexts, thus producing Christians who are often "culturally deformed or even cultural monsters in their own historical community!"\(^\text{27}\)

Suffering from a teacher-complex, Christianity has not been able "to really go deep enough into the history in which the people live with their own stories."\(^\text{28}\) By wanting only to 'speak' but not to 'listen' to the stories of the people; by her willingness only to 'teach' and not to 'learn' from Asians, Christianity has failed to demonstrate any concern for Asian histories. Moreover, because Christianity has contended to be 'wise', 'strong', 'resourceful' and 'efficient' in handling Asian situations, she has failed to be faithful to the mind of Christ. For these reasons, Christianity has remained a superficial religion in the eyes of Asians. And by becoming superficially historical, Christianity has made little impression upon the people of Asia. In other words, the

\(^\text{26}\) ibid., pp. 19-21.

\(^\text{27}\) ibid., p. 100.

\(^\text{28}\) ibid., p. 102.
failure of Christianity really to touch the history of Asia has contributed greatly to the largely indifferent response of Asian people to the Christian faith. Koyama writes,

If Christianity were seriously concerned with history, it would have listened to the stories of the Asian peoples and thus would become a most interesting faith among the Asian peoples.  

Clearly what Koyama is advocating is a Christianity that acts out what it confesses. The Christian church must become truly historical. But the question is, how?

C. Self-Denial: God's Way with People.

Koyama suggests that Christianity can demonstrate its concern for history, that is, the rootedness of its faith in history, through the principle of 'self-denial.' Self-denial expresses the mode, the method and attitude of the Biblical God towards history. It characterizes God's 'respectful' approach to history. The biblical God, says Koyama, comes to history treating it carefully and respectfully but does not 'handle' it. God does not 'grab' history but 'penetrates' it with love thus healing us and making us hopeful.

In the context of primeval history given in the first twelve chapters of Genesis, God's "Where are you?" (Gen. 3.9) points to this self-denying way of God with humanity. In the face of Adam and Eve's disobedience, God comes searching for

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29 ibid., p. 101.
30 ibid., p. 14.
31 ibid., p. 71.
them. God even replaces their fig-leaf aprons by better quality 'garments of skins,' (3. 21). This shows that though the couple were judged (3.14-19), they were helped and respected. In the stories of the Fall, Cain and Abel, Cain's genealogy, the Flood and the Tower of Babel, there is a succession of serious outbreaks of sin accompanied by God's judgement. Yet each time God's corresponding grace abounds.

In Koyama's interpretation, God's 'Where are you?' means that God has come to seek humankind in spite of humankind's disobedience. God has decided to "limit his 'where He is' by man's 'where he is'."32 The 'Where are you' of God is thus a revelation of who God really is. It expresses God's commitment to humankind at all costs.

In the covenant relation between God and Israel, we see the dimension of God's self-denial revealed through God's suffering under the unfaithfulness of the covenant people. The call to love God contained in the 'shema' (Deut. 6: 4f) of Israel points to this suffering of God. Hosea 11. 7-9 roots this suffering of God in divine love and compassion. God suffers out of love for Israel.

Koyama sees in this Hosean passage a poignant expression of the fundamental way by which God comes to history and humanity.

When He acts in love, God demonstrates no less than His proper character as the holy God. Hence He suffers under the lovelessness of His people, whose covenant faithfulness is only like the morning dew which quickly dispels. In the face of its sin He is overcome by a kind of helplessness.  

God's way with people in history is the way of brokenness, helplessness and self-denial. The ultimate manifestation of this divine way is Jesus Christ, the historical man in whom God became incarnate. In Jesus of Nazareth, God's love for the world is demonstrated through death on the cross. By giving up himself, by denying himself and by dying for others, "Jesus came to us." The whole Christian gospel radiates from this self-denial on the cross. And the realization of this truth marks the beginning of the Apostolic faith.

For Koyama, if this is the way of God with humanity, then it must also be the way of Christians in relation to Buddhists and all people. Hence the call to follow Jesus Christ contained in Matthew 16:24 is a call to follow in the way of the cross. And to follow the way of the cross means adopting and identifying oneself with the "crucified mind" of

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33 ibid., p. 46.


35 Koyama considers this passage (Matt. 16:24: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it") to be the christian equivalence of the Israelite shema contained in Deut. 6:4f. Both shemas involve a call to love God in obedience and faithfulness. But under the influence of the cross, the Christian shema calls people to self-denial which brings to expression their obedience and faithfulness to the crucified Lord.
By 'crucified-mind,' Koyama means the mind which has decided to live by the power of the crucified Lord, the mind which desires to seek understanding through the wisdom of the crucified Lord and the mind that speaks of Jesus Christ through the influence of the spirituality and mentality of the crucified Lord.\textsuperscript{36} It means to live with the stigma of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{37} This is the theological structure and meaning of self-denial.

Now in relation to theology and mission of the Christian church in Asia, Koyama believes self-denial is an appropriate theological principle for demonstrating the truth of the gospel. Self-denial can demonstrate the historical rootedness of the Christian faith, namely, that the Christian God takes all human history seriously and that God is concerned with Asian history as much as God is with the history of Israel and the Christians. The image of the 'handle-less' cross expresses this.

Let me emphasize that for me the image of Jesus carrying over his shoulders the intolerable weight of the bulky cross - he did not know how to carry it, yet he carried it 'without a handle' - is the primary image for the understanding and explication of the Christian truth urgently needed today in Asia.\textsuperscript{38}

Self-denial according to Koyama, precludes any formulation of the Christian message in chauvinistic term like 'superiority Christianity,' 'the-best-religion Christianity' and 'finality

\textsuperscript{36} NHC, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 38.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 7.
Christianity' which has been characteristic of Christian theology in Asia.\textsuperscript{39}

Such expressions of Christianity in relation to other religions betray an arrogant, superficial, self-righteous and paternalistic attitude which is incongruous with the mind of God. Christ's finality for instance, according to the Bible, is rooted in Jesus denial of himself on the cross; in the fact that his victory and glorious exaltation is achieved through defeat, through 'being mocked,' 'stripped' and 'spat-upon.' (Matt. 27: 28f). The finality of Jesus Christ is thus a "spat-upon" finality.\textsuperscript{40}

Self-denial is the fundamental qualification for being a Christian witness. To be 'apostolic' means to be ready to be spat upon. And only by living with the stigma of Jesus' self-denial, by readiness 'to be spat upon' and 'become the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things' (1 Cor. 4: 13) can a Christian missionary establish the truthfulness of the Christian faith in the eyes of Asian people.

If a religious man invites another to come to embrace his religion, he must establish the truthfulness of his belief and his self-identity by no less an act than that of self-denial.\textsuperscript{41}

It is important to note that Koyama's choice of the principle of self-denial for the expression of the truth of the Christian faith is far from arbitrary. His choice is determined in large part by the knowledge that self-denial is

\textsuperscript{39} ibid. p. 88.

\textsuperscript{40} ibid., p. 93.

\textsuperscript{41} ibid., p. 33.
something that Asians can identify with. Koyama points out that Asians themselves know what 'self-denial' and to 'live with the stigma of Christ' mean through their own history and experience. As a matter of fact Buddhism, as we have seen in the discussion of the doctrine of 'conditional arising' has the motivation to self-denial at the very centre of its religious life. "To a Buddhist monk," Koyama states, "self-denial is the religious activity."\textsuperscript{42} In this respect self-denial can be said to be an indigenous element of Asian spirituality. And therefore it is conceivable that when Christians live with the stigma of Christ's self-denial as Koyama suggests, Christianity can become beautiful and edifying for Buddhists.

Koyama points out that Christian theology and ministry have consistently looked upon the religious life of Asians only negatively. But to live with stigma of Christ and to think and act in the spirit of the crucified mind means that Christians are required to take a careful and humble look at the lives of religious people.\textsuperscript{43} It demands a change in christian attitude toward adherents of other Asian religions. Since the history of Asia has been addressed by God's historical "Where are you?," this means that Asian history is definitely important and contains much of theological value. To adopt the way of self-denial demands an effort on the part of Christians to discern positive values in the living religious traditions of Asia, not an outright negative

\textsuperscript{42} NHC, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{43} ibid., p. 43.
estimation of them.

In Koyama’s mind, there is only one way by which it can be demonstrated that Christianity is a profound religion to the eyes of adherents of other faiths; that is by the life style of being 'poured out for many.' Such self-denial (based on the historical self-denial of Jesus on the cross) is deeply religious and therefore deeply historical.\(^\text{44}\) Self-denial must therefore form the basis of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity.

D. History and Nature: Different Orientations.

As we pointed out before, Koyama’s experience as a missionary in Thailand has much to do with his particular stress on the historical dimension of the christian faith. There, Koyama discovers even in ordinary Christian piety an apathetic attitude toward God and history which has two major sources.

First there is the influence of Buddhism. The truth about humanity namely, "existence is suffering" (dukkha) lives at the nerve centre of Thai culture and personality. It operates in the Thai worldview with such force as to create a sense of mistrust within the culture against that which is historical and personal.\(^\text{45}\) This view of humanity, which he calls "an anthropology of apatheia" fosters a "neglect of history"

\(^\text{44}\) ibid., p. 108.

\(^\text{45}\) Kosuke Koyama, "THAILAND: Points of Theological Friction", p. 73.
because it teaches that only through the ultimate flight from history can a person realize complete selflessness (anatta) and achieve the perfect state of apatheia (Nirvana).

Another feature of Thai Buddhism which fosters an anti-historical attitude is its ontology centred on the inevitability of decay. That is, the belief that nothing is permanent and everything is subject to decay (anicca). Koyama is critical of this "decay-ontology" because it robs history of the dimension of drama. It impoverishes history by making it simply "decay-history." Moreover, in such an ontology, salvation must be freedom from 'being' and emancipation from history.46

Secondly, there is the influence of nature. The characteristic orientation of the Thai people, as well as most Southeast Asians, is to see and interpret the world in terms of "Nature" and its regular cycles of time which control human life and activity. Because Thai people are agrarian, living in close contact with nature, they believe everything originates from and returns to mother nature. Nature circles without disruption and with cosmic regularity and events have the character of "many-many-many-time-ness."47 One season follows another. Every year at about the same time, the faithful monsoon arrives, impressing people of the dependability of mother nature. Nature is benevolent; it is unperturbed and seldom moved to wrath. Because of this view

46 ibid., p. 76.

and experience of life, the Thai is relatively free from the sense of despair and turmoil which is often bred by the "once-for-all-ness" type of orientation. Thus the benevolent nature of Thailand has an anti-historical intent. Koyama writes,

nature, represented in the image of a perpetual flow of time in a circle neglects history. ... 'Cyclical time' is the image of apatheia translated into the language of time.\(^48\)

That is to say, the orientation of the Thai mind toward nature tends to preclude any significant regard for the biblical idea of history.

How does a christian speak about the gospel centred on the love of God in history, to Asian people for whom the concept of 'history' is of little importance? How should the Christian message be expressed in such a situation where the fundamental orientation is toward 'nature' rather than 'history'? Koyama suggests several ways of dealing with these questions.

1. Biblical Possibility vs Buddhist Inevitability.

Koyama argues that deliverance from this cyclical, static, hopeless view of human existence is accomplished in Judeo-christian faith which asserts the primacy of history over nature. God himself is involved as Creator and Redeemer in the history of Israel and of all humankind. History is therefore not absurd or meaningless. It is part of the

experience of God in relation to human beings. Involved as
human beings are in its movement, Asians have no justification
for neutrality, detachment or apathy.

In contrast to the Buddhist apathetic view of existence
based on the principle of 'inevitability', Koyama takes the
nomadic existence which characterizes much Hebrew biblical
history as a clue to the meaning of historical existence in
general. This biblical mode of existence is accompanied by the
unique concept of 'possibility.' The nomad in his wandering
experiences history as a series of unpredictable events rather
than as an automatic process of decay. In the rugged, windy
and barren wilderness where he wanders, the nomad is open to
all sorts of threats and dangers, yet at the same time, the
'wilderness' provides countless possibilities for human
spirituality. 49 Amid risk he finds renewal of spirit (Isa.
40: 28-31). It is in the wilderness that God comes to Israel
saying, "I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; you
know no God but me, and besides me there is no saviour. It was
I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought"
(Hosea 13: 4-5). "I remember the devotion of your youth, your
love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a
land not sown." (Jeremiah 2: 2).

Nomadic existence in the Bible is rooted in the character
of God who is Himself nomadic. The biblical God is a God on
the way, with and before people, calling and leading them
forward. The future of humanity is thus neither annulled by

49 Kosuke Koyama, "'Not by bread alone . . .' How does
Jesus Free and Unite us?" Ecumenical Review, Vol. 27 (July
1975), p. 204.
the fact of dukkha nor a path closed by the 'inevitability of
decay' but open-ended, offering ever-new possibilities for
life. God has freed humanity to make decisions on the basis
of reason and conscience, rather than passively acquiescing
in the functioning of the natural order. In this freedom
humanity can affect its own destiny.

2. An Ascending Spiral view of History:

When the world is viewed as "nature," time appears to be
circular and events have the character of "many-time-ness."
This is part of the traditional "monsoon orientation" of most
Southeast Asians as we have seen. When the world is viewed as
history, time appears to be linear and events are
characterized by "once-for-all-ness." This is part of the
world view of the biblical writers. The first is symbolized
by a 'circle,' the second by a 'straight line.' There is an
obvious tension between these contrasting worldviews. Are the
two views incompatible?

In an attempt to resolve this tension, Koyama suggests
a new model: an ascending spiral which combines in itself the
circle and the line, symbolizing both regularity and
direction. Under this symbol, historical time is circular in
one sense and linear in another. By locating the Thai circular
view within the biblical linear view of history he shows how
the former is illumined by the latter. The God in the Bible
is anti-monsoon in orientation. Neither cyclical nor
many-time-ness, God is linear and once-for-all. But faith in
this God enables one to realize that the cyclical cosmic regularity and the saving dependability of nature which constitutes the spirit of the monsoon orientation is something within the saving purpose of the God proclaimed in the Bible. Cosmic regularity is intended by the Creator God according to the biblical faith. The regularity of nature is a 'promise of God.' It is there not by itself but by God's promise. Through the promise God made to Noah, a new community of people comes into existence where cosmic regularity and "cyclical words" become the divine decision to save creation. Also, the fact that God is the Creator means "beyond-nature." It means God is not a part of nature but the one who "sits enthroned over the flood." (Ps. 29: 3-11) In other words, God rules nature.

In the history of Israel, we can see that 'the one who sits enthroned over the flood' is also the Lord of history. God who is ruler over nature is therefore also the 'controller of history.' Hosea makes this point quite clearly. He says:

And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. (Hosea 2: 8-9)

In fact the prophets describe how Israel's Creator-Ruler God works to save humanity within the sphere of cosmic regularity (nature) and also in an area which theology calls 'history.' So in biblical faith, both nature and history are one in expressing God's intention to help humanity. In other words, both belong to God. The problem however is how to relate the two.
Is history within nature or is it the other way round? Koyama’s answer takes the biblical affirmation that humanity should see nature in the light of the Creator-God. Nature must not be understood only naturally. It must be theologically appropriated, since "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and not "in the beginning the heavens and the earth created God." That is to say, the cosmic regularity of nature must be placed within (or under) the purpose of God who is Lord over all cosmic realities. But by being under God’s rule does not mean that nature in any way ceases to be nature and begins to take on some divine character. No, it continues to be nature, expressing the mind of the Creator. She is not the Creator.

In summary, what Koyama is proposing here is a way to reconcile the two contrasting views of history, the 'circular' view of Buddhism and the 'linear' view of the Bible. Using the image of an ascending spiral which combines both views into a unified one, namely "history-nature", Koyama shows that the two views are not really incompatible. Nature, like history, is of God and derives from God. "We see the glory of God both in history and in nature. Circular nature shows God’s glory as much as linear history. Both are purposeful." In other words, the orientation toward nature finds its proper place within linear history. In this proper location, circular nature finds its purpose.

50 Kosuke Koyama, "Will the Monsoon Rain Make God Wet?" p. 142.

51 ibid., p. 144.
For Koyama, if this model can help bring the presence of God closer to the people of Thailand, there seems no good reason why it cannot be utilized by Christians. "Is not this image helpful and even necessary in the land of the monsoon orientation?"\(^{52}\)

3. 'Wrath of God' vs Thai 'Apatheia'

Koyama confronts the Buddhist apatheia (tranquillity) ideal with the biblical principle of the 'wrath of God.' Following Luther's insight that the wrath of God contradicts human domestication of God, Koyama's reflection on the Thai theological situation leads him to the contention that "Thai theology, bolstered by an indigenous apatheia ideal, tends inadvertently to neglect 'God in history' by reducing the wrath of God to a matter of minor significance."\(^{53}\) He asserts that the biblical idea of the 'wrath of God' has to be spoken once again against popular Christian piety in Thailand today. Why? because under the influence of Theravada Buddhism which has 'tranquillity' (apatheia) as one of its cardinal teachings, as well as the influence of nature which we have already described, the Biblical message of the "wrath of God" tends to be regarded by Thai Christians as a matter of minor concern. It is treated with indifference; as something of little theological importance. As a matter of fact, the

\(^{52}\) ibid.,

'wrath of God' has become a stumbling block to the spiritual and intellectual climate of Thailand.

Koyama argues that by disregarding the wrath of God, by reducing it to something of minor significance, an important part of the gospel message is thus lost. For without God's wrath, that is to say, when the love of God is divorced from divine wrath, God's love becomes distorted and superficial. The latter becomes an easy "love monism" or "cheap love" - to use Kazo Kitamori's words - which is a sick distortion of the truth.54

A more fundamental problem which Koyama anticipates with the suppression of the idea of the wrath of God by the Buddhist apatheia ideal is the inevitable loss of God's historicity. The tendency of the Thai mind to identify God with an absolutist Idea beyond history, a timeless, apathetic, emotionless God, leads to a theology which neglects history. A consequence of this would be a failure to see the reality of God in history. For a God who cannot truly be moved to wrath, that is, an apathetic God without emotion cannot have anything to do with history and human beings. But the Christian God is not like this. The God of the bible is concerned with people in history.

Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day you came out of the land of Egypt, until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. (Deut. 9: 7; cf. Deut. 32: 21; Isa. 10: 5-6; Amos 3: 2)

This passage indicates that God's wrath is directed to and

carried out with the historical people of Israel. That God's perturbation has people in history as its object clearly shows that God is historical. Since God can truly be moved to wrath, God cannot be timeless, apathetic and beyond history but a "God in history."\(^{55}\)

The wrath of God is therefore the critical expression of God in history. And for this reason, Koyama suggests that the message of the "wrath of God" has to be re-emphasized in Thailand today. It has to be an essential part of the preaching of the Christian church, specifically in order to correct popular notions which tend to see God as an impersonal and a beyond-history reality.

Koyama claims that the wrath of God is a good way of attacking the root of this theology of neglect of history, because it provides a contradicting force to combat the prevalent spirit of theologia gloriae based on the non-perturbationes animi ideal (apatheia). It contains within it the disturbing and critical imagery which can create the much needed impact to awaken the mind captivated by the theology of 'neglect of history.' He writes,

\[\text{The wrath of God contradicts the theology of 'neglect of history,' the theology under the influence of the Thai apatheia ideal (the 'anatta-istic' flight from history and the naturalistic aversion of the seriousness in history) by insisting upon the fundamental relationship between the wrath of God and history. God can be moved to wrath because he is 'God in history.' Or, only 'God in history' can be}\]

\(^{55}\) Kosuke Koyama, "Wrath of God vs. Thai Theologia Gloriae," ibid.
meaningfully moved to wrath.\textsuperscript{56}

Furthermore, the wrath of God can 'historicize' God in the way the Bible does. The biblical passages of the divine perturbationes animi speak emphatically of the fact that God's wrath has historical and covenantal reason. God's wrath is provoked by the historical violation of God's 'holiness and love.'\textsuperscript{57} Thus, the wrath of God can demonstrate that God is historical, that is, history is the locus of God's perturbationes animi, thus making history seriously real.

E. Buddhists, Not Buddhism.

Koyama stresses the priority of understanding Buddhists rather than Buddhism. His concern is with flesh and blood people, not Buddhism as an abstraction or a set of doctrines. Of course one has to study Buddhist teachings in order to understand Buddhism, but one's ultimate interest must lie, however, with the Buddhist person.

What really matters is not a set of doctrines called Buddhism, but people who live according to the doctrine of the Buddha, or I should say who are trying to live according to the doctrine of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{58}

Koyama suggests that this must be the strategy of the Christian church in Asia. Here Koyama is alluding to the mission strategy of the church in earlier years where the


\textsuperscript{57} Refer, Deut. 9: 7; 32: 21; Isa. 10: 5-6; Amos. 3: 2.

\textsuperscript{58} WBT, p. 129.
tendency to engage in a comparison of Christianity and Buddhism often leads to negative results. For example, Christians frequently launch into 'the defence of the right doctrines' so passionately and energetically that they "become Christianity and cease to be Christians."\textsuperscript{59} That is, they become more concerned with defending the doctrines of the church than with practising the faith. Consequently, there arises a tendency among Christians to look at other persons or pass judgement upon others through doctrinally-trained eyes.\textsuperscript{60}

Moreover, preoccupation with Buddhist doctrines tends to belittle the importance of human beings. That is, the priority shifts from people to doctrine. For Koyama, understanding Buddhism is an important mission activity, but this is not an end in itself. Its goal is to help us understand the Buddhist person. This does not mean minimizing the importance of understanding the ancient document of faith, but it means, putting the priority on people rather than on matters of doctrine. It means that for the mission of the church, the Buddhist person must matter most. Why? Simply because Buddhists are human beings with needs like those of all humanity.

Buddhism as a religious system does not feel hungry even if it does not eat for centuries; it does not sweat even under the hot tropical sun. A Buddhist, on the contrary, is different. "He complains, laughs, grieves, sweats, suffers,\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{59} ibid., p. 130.

\textsuperscript{60} ibid., p. 132.
thirsts and hungers – for he is a man."\textsuperscript{61} Like Christians, a Buddhist does not cease to be human simply by being an adherent of the Buddhist faith. Neither an angel nor a devil, a Buddhist, by the grace of God, remains as much a human being as a person of another faith. And as a human being, a Buddhist deserves to be respected and appreciated.

The primacy of the Buddhist in Koyama's thought is rooted in the fact that humanity is created in the image of God. The biblical doctrine of the 'image of God' means that Buddhists are included in God's redemptive plan for the world. God affirms the dignity of Buddhist people. Thus whenever the Christian church speaks on the issue of the 'dignity of man,' this doctrine has been the point of departure. The unfortunate thing in Koyama's observation is that this doctrine has, in the history of Christian mission tended to remain simply a doctrine, unrelated to the life of people. Thus he suggests that if the doctrine is to display its dynamic and real power, it must be actualized in human relationships. It must become integrated into our appreciation of people with whom we come in contact everyday. It has to become not just a theory but practical reality.

F. Appropriate Language.

One of the ways by which the christian faith can be brought to encounter Buddhist spirituality is by the use of appropriate and relevant language, particularly in the task.

\textsuperscript{61} ibid., p. 130.
of preaching and proclamation of the word. In studying the church's past in North Thailand, Koyama finds that the dedication and piety of the pioneer Western missionaries is visibly stamped upon churches spread over the Thai countryside. Whilst he acknowledges with gratitude the missionary effort of past years, he is nevertheless critical of the method used in proclaiming the gospel message, in view of the hearers' total existential situation. "In my ministry here today," he writes, "I am forced to see how thoroughly strange and unrealistic - how Western - is the Christian vocabulary to the ears of my Thai neighbours." He finds that the language in which the content of the gospel message was expressed was not only unfamiliar but was totally out of touch with the world of the Thais. And whether the Thais themselves really understood the preaching of the early missionaries, he had obvious doubts.

An examination of the literature of the early missionaries leads Koyama to the criticism that the language in which the gospel message was expressed was too "direct and straightforward." The terminology used to express the main ingredients of the gospel, having been derived directly from the Western tradition that is largely influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, was too "inflexible" to be understood by people unfamiliar with such language. Words like 'infinite love,' 'sin,' 'incarnation,' 'redemption through his blood' or 'eternal life,' for example, may have been familiar terms to Western ears but to Asians, they were strange and thus

62 ibid., p. 81.
prone to misunderstanding. Such words only invited "cultural resistance, psychological antipathy and emotional reaction." Expressing the gospel message through this kind of language may have seemed at face value, comfortable enough for the 'listening' Thai - who out of cultural modesty might not say aloud what the Epicureans and Stoics said to Paul at Athens, "What is this babbler saying?" (Acts 17: 18f) - but for the 'believing' Buddhist with a different cultural and religious frame of reference, such language was definitely a stumbling block. There is need therefore to re-root the gospel message in relevant language.

1. Hebraization of Buddhist Words:

In an effort to find a better way of expressing the content of the gospel, Koyama suggests that there are certain key words in Buddhist terminology that can be baptized and used more effectively in the communication of the christian gospel. Such familiar words must be utilized in place of Western words, in order for the Buddhists to understand and grasp the meaning of the christian message. Certainly there are inevitable risks involved in this kind of undertaking and Koyama is not unaware of this. But since the communication of the gospel in any culture is never risk-free, the implication is quite obvious. After all Paul and John dared to use such loaded words as 'logos' (word), 'soter' (saviour), 'mysterion' (mystery), 'metamorphosis' (transformation) for their own

63 ibid.
evangelistic purposes, in the confidence that these 'heathen' words could be employed as faithful servants when placed in the context of the Christian kerygma.

To exemplify what Koyama means by the use of appropriate language, he experiments with what he calls the 'Hebraization' of key Buddhist concepts such as dukkha, anicca, and anatta. By Hebraization, Koyama means bringing the historical experience of the covenant-people (Israel) to the dukkha, anicca and anatta concepts. It means, "injecting the covenant concept into the Thai indigenous spiritual and religious concepts. In short, Hebraization is 'covenantization.'" 64

Using the principle of 'covenant' (Deut. 7: 6-8) Koyama brings into focus the theological significance of the radical difference between the Christian and Buddhist view of history. In the context of the covenant, Israel experienced herself as the one being saved by God. God is experienced as Saviour, the One who saves in history. Yet Israel, in terms of the covenant did not remain faithful to God. God experienced Israel as being an unfaithful and rebellious covenant partner (cf. Deut. 9: 7).

Expressing this covenant relationship using Buddhist terminology, Koyama says,

Israel is 'unsatisfactory' (dukkha) to God. This is God's experience of them. Israel's devotion to God is 'transitory' and 'impermanent' (anicca) (c.f. Hos. 6: 4). They destroyed themselves (anatta) by rebelling against their God, (c.f. Amos. 4: 10). 65

In spite of Israel's "unsatisfactoriness," "transitoriness"

64 WBT, p. 156.
65 ibid., pp. 153f.
and "self-destructiveness," God remains in a saving covenant with her. This is the meaning of the Christian claim that God does not go away from history, but engages in it. God’s faithfulness is directed into history even though that history is full of 'unsatisfactoriness,' 'transitoriness' and 'self-devastation' as represented by the covenant people of Israel.

Koyama uses the theological perspective of 'history as the experience of God' to view the Buddhist concepts of dukkha, anicca, and anatta. He believes that by placing them in the context of God’s experience of history, their meanings are changed radically. Dukkha no longer simply means 'unsatisfactoriness' of existence, but it signifies humanity’s unsatisfactory commitment and devotion to God. Similarly, anicca does not mean human realization of the impermanence and transience of existence, but realization of the fact that the covenant relationship with God is broken by humanity’s changeable and transitory devotion to God. Finally, the doctrine of anatta, which inspires the Buddhist to eliminate the 'self' as the source of all trouble becomes a useful indicator that when human beings reject God’s covenantal faithfulness, they move towards the destruction and elimination of their own selfhood.

Koyama’s main goal in this exercise is to 'historicize' these Buddhist concepts. Dukkha, anicca and anatta are concepts which arose out of Buddha’s depth-psychological analysis of the predicament of humanity. All three inspire the Buddhist to a life of 'detachment' from history. Their
orientation is towards something outside of existence, that
is, outside of history and time. Thus bringing these concepts
to Israel’s experience of history would historicize them.

When dukkha, anicca and anatta are placed, as marks
of man, in the covenant relationship with God, they
are historicized. In this theological perspective
of God’s experience of history ... the insight of
the Buddha and the message of Israel encounter one
another. This point is the point of
historicization.66

For Koyama, the Hebraization of these concepts is significant
in that it will help us to see the radical difference between
'detachment' from history and 'attachment' to history. And
while it engages in this theological operation, it will
clarify also the centrality of 'God in history' by the power
of his presence and work in history. Moreover, by injecting
new meanings into these concepts, these essential marks of
Buddhism are transformed into factors contributing to the
elucidation of the Christian God, One who is involved in
history.

2. Neighbourological Language.

Another suggestion Koyama makes with regard to the
problem of communicating the gospel in Asia involves the use
of what he calls "neighbourological" language.67 Such
language is one which is defined by an awareness of the actual
reality of the human situation of the people with whom the

66 ibid., p. 155.

67 Kosuke Koyama, "Prelude to a 'Neighbour-ology',"
christian missionary works. It is christian language that not only takes seriously the religious convictions of others, but also sensitive to what Koyama calls, the actual "reality of the neighbour."

By this phrase, Koyama conveys an understanding of 'reality' in the same sense as John Baillie defines it in another context. In his The Sense of the Presence of God, Baillie writes,

The test of reality is the resistance it offers to the otherwise uninhibited course of my own thinking, desiring and acting. Reality is what I 'come up against', what takes me by surprise, the other-than-myself which pulls me up and obliges me to reckon with it and adjust myself to it because it will not consent simply to adjust itself to me.\(^{68}\)

Reality here in the context of the presence of God is, according to Koyama, directly applicable to the reality of neighbour. The neighbour is one whom I 'come up against'; not 'maya' (illusion) but a very real person. Capable of resistance, having certain desires and acting in different ways, a neighbour's reality is 'other than myself.' In other words, the reality of the neighbour cannot simply be defined "in my own terms."\(^{69}\)

The missionary, in "coming up against" the neighbour realizes that (s)he is sandwiched between Christ's saving reality and his neighbour's "other-than-myself" reality. This sandwiched position constitutes the missionary's identity. By remaining, on one hand, committed to the Word of God, and on


\(^{69}\) WBT, p. 90.
the other, having a sense of solidarity with Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic or animistic neighbours whom (s) he meets in the world, the missionary retains his/her identity. Further, in this sandwiched position, the missionary is able to communicate the message of the 'real' Christ to the 'real' neighbours. How? - by taking the questions of the neighbours to the enlightenment and judgement of the Word of God; - by seriously taking the neighbour's questions and seeking answers to them in the light of Christ.⁷⁰

Neighbourological language for Koyama therefore is basically a way of seeing others as they really are, immediately and straightforwardly "without any artificial cushion."⁷¹ It is language which acknowledges and reflects acceptance by Christians of the real claim which neighbours make on them. Such language is rooted in the mission of Jesus himself. Jesus Christ, faced by the reality of his neighbour, accepted the claim the neighbour made on him. His confrontation with his neighbour (for example, the woman who had had the spirit of infirmity for eighteen years in Luke 13: 11 – 6) was 'uncushioned.' And this uncushioned neighbourology of Christ cut like a knife through the 'cushioned neighbourology' of the ruler of the synagogue. Neighbourological language therefore carries a weighty responsibility in our theological obedience to the living Lord Jesus Christ. If this is the way of Christ with his

⁷⁰ Kosuke Koyama, "Prelude to a 'Neighbour-ology'," p.173.

⁷¹ WBT, p. 92.
neighbours, then it must also be the way for every christian.

Moreover, it is imperative for every christian to adopt this neighbourological language because the effectiveness of his/her witness to Christ depends a lot on it. In Koyama’s observation, what appears to make more impact on Asian people are those biblical passages which are closer to their own experience of life in Asia. Thus a passage like Luke 22: 44 ("And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground") may make no impression on them whereas Genesis 3: 19 ("... in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread") would. What Koyama means here is that for Asians, it is easy to comprehend the human condition of 'sweating' which comes as a result of toiling and physical work, because hard manual work and physical activity is an intricate part of their own normal everyday life. But to picture 'sweat' in terms of 'blood' is totally incomprehensible basically because such a metaphorical connection is absolutely unfamiliar and to a certain extent unacceptable to Asian ears. Blood, to most Asians, is the life force of the human being. To drain the blood from the body means to deprive it of life. And for this deprivation to happen to Jesus is hard to reconcile with the thought of Jesus as the 'living' Lord. Furthermore, the notion of 'warm blood' in connection with Jesus' redemptive death is irreconcilable with Asian mentality.\footnote{In many parts of Asia for instance, there are no words for 'sacrifice' (Rikin) and 'sin' (Simon Rae). Thus to view Jesus redemptive work in terms of a 'blood sacrifice' for the 'sin' of the world is totally unintelligible. And in this connection, one can understand what Koyama means by the}
observation, Koyama is led to assert that the goal of
christian mission would best be served by using
neighbourological rather than the usual christological
language of the church. He writes,

our neighbours in Asia are ready to hear our
message of Christ if we put it in
'neighbourological' language, though they would
reject Christ if we were to present him in
christological language.\(^7\)

This kind of language, Koyama claims, is, in fact, the best
vessel to convey Christ in Asia.

G. Theological Approach.

Besides his reservations about the language in which the
gospel was expressed, Koyama is also critical of the
theological approach employed by early missionaries to convey
christian truths in Asia. Study of the history of the Church
in Thailand shows that the traditional cosmological proof of
the existence of the intelligent God was a popular starting
point. In Koyama's observation, this approach had some merit
but only to a limited extent. No doubt the Buddhist psychology
of 'dependent origination' has prepared the Thai mind for the
difficulty faced by Asians in understanding a reference like
Luke 22.44 (Jesus' sweat becoming like drops of blood), in
comparison to the ease with which a similar passage like
Genesis 3.19 ("in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread")
is received. In other words, the mention of 'blood' in
connection with Jesus is an unfamiliar concept in Asian
cultural understanding. This information was obtained from an
Indonesian biblical scholar, Dr. Rikin (and substantiated by
Simon Rae, a NZ Presbyterian minister who spent time as a
missionary in Indonesia) during a talk given to members of the
Faculty of Theology at Otago University.

\(^7\) WBT, p. 93.
Aristotelian world view of scientific causality. However, a crucial problem still remains. This involves the distinction between the God understood through recognition of design in the universe and the variety of spirits worshipped by Thai people.

Among the people, the christian God tends to be regarded in the same way as the many local gods, without distinction. In Koyama's view, the distinction hinges on the important question concerning the mind or character of the christian God. Koyama writes,

> It has been made clear to me in my rural ministry here that this important question of the cosmological argument - what kind of mind? - is intensified, if in my congregation there is one person who is born crippled or made blind by accident. People say to me that there may certainly be a mind behind the universe but if that mind can produce such cruel irregularities as cripples and blindness, it must be capricious and erratic.  

Reflecting upon that experience, Koyama is led to the conviction that the missionary approach centred on the cosmological proof of God does not adequately express the truth of the Christian God. In fact, it has proved more paralysing than helpful toward a real understanding of the character and real presence of God among Thais. Whilst this Aristotelian argument may be useful at the level of 'pre-evangelization,' it produces unwanted and even destructive effects when it is incorporated into the substance of the Christian message.  

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74 ibid., p. 86.

75 ibid.,
calls "kitchen-theology," as a clear indication of the misunderstanding and confusion of Thai Christians about the christian message, caused by the inadequacy of the theological approach as well as the language difficulties mentioned above.

'Kitchen-produced-theology,' observes Koyama, is a popular type of theological activity which reflects an effort on the part of Thai Christians to translate the gospel message from its western clothing to their own indigenous terms of reference. It is a process of theological thinking freely going on among Thai Christians where the content of the gospel - already couched in Western interpretation (Aristotelian pepper) - is again interpreted through Buddhist understanding (Buddhist salt) in order to suit the local taste.

My observation is that upon accepting the gospel, the Thai season the Christian ingredients - whether they be 'infinite love,' 'sin,' 'incarnation' ... with their own Buddhist salt. Why Buddhist salt? Very briefly, it is because the Thai culture is permeated with the strong influence of Theravada Buddhism."

This kind of theological activity goes on unconsciously and unintentionally among Christians. It takes place not in theological schools but in ordinary and common places symbolized by the 'kitchen.' What is produced is a christian theology with a distinctively Thai flavour.

In this connection, Koyama demonstrates how the Buddhist philosophy of 'detachment' which Thais had inherited can season the Christian message rooted in God's 'attachment' to humanity. The Christian message is based on the 'infinite

76 ibid., p. 83.
77 ibid., pp. 81f.
love' of God. According to ingrained Thai emotion and psychology, the word 'love' (khwamrak) denotes man's attachment to things, persons or supernatural beings. But according to the great principle of 'inevitability' which the Buddha taught, 'attachment' inevitably produces sorrow and trouble while 'detachment' inevitably creates tranquillity, honesty and genuine happiness.

Christianity teaches attachment. To Thai ears, to say 'God loves the world' is the same as saying 'God desires to be attached to the world.' In this sense the creative newness of the Christian concept of 'love' is crippled by the old principle of 'inevitability.' And even if the distinction between 'attachment' and 'detachment' is grasped, the sharp edge of the Christian doctrine of love is lost since it is blighted by the idea of 'inevitability.'

Now Koyama claims that the theological process of seasoning the gospel with 'Buddhist salt' has both negative and positive aspects. Negatively, one is sometimes confronted by an 'Asokanized Christ.' Such a Christ is a blurred or a 'dim Christ.' In much the same way, Koyama claims that the God theorized under the missionary influence of Western Aristotelian rationality (he calls this, 'Aristotelian Christ') is "as dim as the Asokanized Christ." On the positive side, seasoning the gospel with Buddhist salt helps clarify the meaning of the gospel, making it as it were, palatable for the Thai Christians.

\[78\] ibid., p. 87.
Koyama believes that it is impossible to have an unseasoned or raw Christ. Jesus after all was a Palestinian Jew. The incarnation of the Son of God means his 'in-culture-ation.' This suggests that one must not simply reject the 'pepper and salt' of any culture, but attempt to see 'what kind' of pepper and salt is seasoning Christ and try to present a well-seasoned Christ in co-operation with the local pepper and salt.\textsuperscript{79} Koyama's concern is thus not with the question of whether or not any culture can season the gospel given the blurred or 'dim Christ' that often results, but with the question of how to season it so that its truth might be appropriated. "The point is that Christ will become a genuinely 'tasty' Christ not in the outright rejection of both Aristotelian pepper and Buddhist salt, but rather in using them."\textsuperscript{80} For Koyama, the important question is "What kind of use?" By what theological principles do we engage in this dangerous (and unavoidable) task? How can one use Aristotle and Buddha to articulate Jesus Christ biblically in Thailand?

\textsuperscript{79} ibid., p. 88.

\textsuperscript{80} ibid., p. 78.
CHAPTER 9: HUMAN GREED.

The main discussion of the phenomenon of Greed is found in Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai. On this important theme, many of Koyama's main concerns converge. Greed provides a way of bridging the cosmological world of Asia and the 'historical' world of the bible. 'Cosmological' Buddhism can be seen to be a 'historical' religion by virtue of the fact that it directs its attention to the task of overcoming greed. By making the elimination of greed its central goal, Buddhism makes an important contribution to the understanding of history and reality. Greed is closely linked with idolatry. It provides Koyama with a standpoint for a prophetic critique of modern industrial society with clear practical implications, especially in his treatment of Japan.

A. Greed links Cosmological and Historical orientations.

Discussion of the theme of 'greed' emerges out of Koyama's attempt to find a way to bridge the difference between the Asian and biblical world-views. Asian spirituality is basically 'cosmological.' The fundamental orientation of

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1 Koyama recognizes the variety of spiritual orientations among Asian people. Yet in spite of these diversities, he believes there is a common base of Asian spirituality. This can be seen more clearly when viewed against the background of Western spirituality. Asian spirituality is concerned with undifferentiated totality 'before' creation, while Western spirituality is interested in differentiated totality 'after' creation. Asian spirituality is rooted in a fascination with the primordial behaviour of nature, be it cyclical movement, vitality of plants or movement of air. For details, see Kosuke Koyama, "Asian Spirituality," in A Dictionary of Christian
the Asian mind is to view God, the world and human existence in terms of cosmic totality. Reality is understood in terms of the continuity of nature, the unity of heaven and earth, the sacred and the profane, gods and human beings. Cosmic totality, expressed in the image of the continuity of heaven and earth is believed to have a healing effect upon the human soul. That is to say, salvation is to be found within the embrace of the totality of "heaven and earth." 

In contrast, the spirituality of the bible is historical. Biblical orientation is towards history in relation to God who creates, rules and acts redemptively in it while at the same time remaining discontinuous with history. This kind of spiritual orientation is eschatological in the sense that the cosmos is seen to be subject to eschatological (transcendent) judgement. The creator-ruler-redeemer God who acts in history also judges history and re-creates it. This God, according to the biblical faith is the source of human salvation.


The philosophical understanding of the concept of 'heaven and earth' which originated in China has influenced Japanese culture since the seventh century. In Chinese thought, Heaven is the original life principle, the primordial ancestor of all beings and the One through whom all things came to being. Earth is the concrete manifestation of heaven. Heaven and earth (nature) therefore symbolize cosmic totality. In Chinese thinking, the world of nature and people are somewhat differentiated, and priority is given to the former over the latter. From heaven and earth come material blessing and spiritual health for human beings. While Chinese appreciation of nature is from the side of the practical needs of life, the Japanese extend that appreciation to an utter devotion to nature. Later, with the incorporation of Buddhist ideas, the Japanese come to view salvation as something exclusively tied in with the embrace of nature. See, MFMS, p. 69f.
There is a clear discontinuity between God and nature in the biblical orientation which is not found in the cosmic nature religions. This raises a crucial question. How are these two totally different orientations to be brought into a positive inter-relationship? Is there a possible link between the two, or, are they theologically irreconcilable?

In dealing with this fundamental question, Koyama raises another related question which concerns him deeply. This is to do with the failure of the cosmological orientation to deal with questions of ethics and the social existence of humanity, questions relating to the human need for peace, justice, freedom and social well-being. Theological reflection upon the history of Japan, particularly the annihilation of millions in 1945, leads Koyama to the conviction that there is something which the embrace of 'heaven and earth' cannot do. Salvation understood in terms of cosmic embrace cannot heal the wounds and scars inflicted on humanity by the "misfortunes and terror" of history. "How can the cosmos deal with the misfortune and disasters of history? Can heaven and earth

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3 Using the words of the Psalmist, Koyama demonstrates this basic contrast between the world of Asia and that of the Bible. While historical spirituality proclaims that 'my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth' (Ps. 121:2), cosmological spirituality would say 'my help comes from heaven and earth.' In the former, the cosmos is seen within the structure of religion. The latter sees religion within the structure of the cosmos, nature. "'Heaven and earth' is not a totality created by One who is beyond it. The gods and buddhas are within heaven and earth." MFMS, p. 74.

'house' (ecologize) social injustice and heal it?"5

This is where the concept of Greed comes into play. Koyama argues that many of the 'unnatural' disasters in human history are caused by a destructive spiritual energy called human greed.6 That is to say, human beings themselves, through greed, contribute to historical calamities. Obviously the reality of human greed cannot be explained in the cosmological context because the religious mind which participates in cosmic awareness understands all disasters to be due to the works of nature, the cosmos. The fact remains however that there is a human dimension in tragedies and misfortunes. And when one is aware of human factors in tragedy, one begins to participate in historical awareness. An "awareness of human greed opens up our mind to the awareness of history."7

History and ethics are closely related concepts in Koyama's thought. Historical thought is impossible apart from ethical consideration. Historical awareness of the destructive power of human greed excite one's ethical sensitivity. In this respect, greed is an ethical (historical) and not a cosmological concept. To put it in a different way, greed is "anthropological, not natural" because greed has to do with

5 MFMS, p. 105.

6 ibid., p. 107. Whilst it is true that a disaster like famine, for instance, usually arises from natural causes, Koyama believes that it can also come through the combination of human greed and mismanagement, violence against fellow humans and against nature.

7 ibid., p. 107.
human beings and not with nature. Only human beings have the freedom to be greedy or not greedy.

In the light of all this Koyama concludes that "the critical awareness of human greed bridges between the cosmological and the historical." He sees in the concept of greed a possibility for bringing the nature-oriented spirituality of Asia into a positive relationship with the history-oriented spirituality of Christianity. Though a negative concept, greed nevertheless, can be named as a "bridging element that takes us from the world of nature to that of history."

1. Eliminating Greed: Historical Dimension of Buddhism.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the primitive message of Buddhism embodied in the Four Noble Truths has three central words: ignorance, greed and suffering. Ignorance begets greed, and greed in turn produces suffering.

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8 Koyama asserts that greed is a historical concept because it is rooted in the exercise of human 'freedom' that characterizes all historical existence. Now, both the use and abuse of freedom (greed) arise within human nature. But when we speak of the struggle against human greed we are in the area of history, not nature. Hence, any ethics which fight against human greed arises not from cosmic awareness but from historical thought. MFMS, p. 109.

9 ibid., p. 111.

10 ibid., p. 107.

11 The original words used in the discussion of the doctrine of 'conditional arising' in the previous chapter are ignorance, craving (or grasping) and suffering. But the substitution of greed for 'craving' here is not at all inappropriate. As we shall see later on, Koyama's definition of greed does mean grasping or craving for more.
By destroying greed, ignorance and in turn suffering disappear. Koyama argues that because Buddhism takes up the problem of Greed (tanha) as its primary concern, it demonstrates itself to be a historical religion. Not in terms of a Christian view of history, but in its own way, it defines history and takes it seriously.

Such a claim goes against popular christian views about Buddhism. But Koyama believes that such judgement has been one-sided and too simplistic. He gives the following reasons. First, like Christianity which cannot stand without the historical Jesus, Buddhist faith is an impossibility apart from the inspiring historical existence of the human person called Gotama. In view of this impressive historical personality, Buddhism cannot simply be described as a faith with no interest in history. Second, the Buddha’s rejection of the Vedic Hindu religious system of ritual sacrifices to gods as of no value for the destruction of greed and suffering is suggestive of a move towards the concept of historical responsibility. By declaring his independence from the cosmological sociology of Vedic India and moving in the direction of the modern world in which the worth of a person is decided morally rather than cosmologically, the Buddha shows a concern for humanity. This, says Koyama, is obviously a direction towards historical thinking.

12 Typically, the answer given by christian theologians to the question of whether or not Buddhism is a history-oriented faith is usually a negative one.

13 ibid., pp. 118-120.
Thirdly, the Buddhist understanding of 'ignorance' indicates an inherent emphasis on history. Ignorance is unawareness of the relationship between human greed and human suffering. Greed is the cause of suffering. Therefore in order to be free from suffering, one has to destroy greed. Now for the Buddha, the transition from ignorance (greed and suffering) to nirvana (freedom) is historical and empirical. It is a transition that has to be worked out within history. This means that the struggle towards achieving nirvana begins in this world, where we live. What sense is there if the concept of ignorance has nothing to do with this historical world?

Obviously, Koyama argues, an "a-historical ignorance" cannot produce an "historical greed," nor can a "thirsting greed" be possibly "a-historical." \(^{14}\) Whatever we may say about greed, it is non-sensical if it is not historically defined. Greed is a phenomenon which has no real meaning outside the context of human beings living in history. It is within historical existence that real people become susceptible to and imprisoned by greed through ignorance. It is within history that people engage in the battle against greed. In this respect, Buddhism can be seen to be an 'historical' religion.

Koyama says: "The thirsting greed of humanity is the point at which the Buddhist proclamation anchors itself deeply in history." \(^{15}\) By directing its attention to the task of

\(^{14}\) ibid., p. 120.

\(^{15}\) ibid., p. 117.
overcoming greed, Buddhism demonstrates that it does take history seriously; that it is far more history-oriented than it is generally understood to be.\textsuperscript{16}

2. Correspondence Between Buddhism and Christianity.

It is the central message of Buddhism which brings it into direct relationship with the historical faith of the Bible. Koyama observes that since the fundamental message of the Buddha concentrates on urging us to fight against our own human greed, there is something in this message which coincides with the prophetic spirit of the Bible. Just as the message of Jeremiah, for instance, is directed against the social injustice, human exploitation, unrighteousness and the like during his time,\textsuperscript{17} so is the message of Buddhism with its emphasis on human greed. For, according to the teachings of the Buddha, social injustice and unrighteousness derive from greed.\textsuperscript{18} In other words, the biblical concern for justice and righteousness in human life is an inherent concern of the Buddhist message centred on the elimination of greed.

Furthermore, the Buddhist thought of renouncing self which means, in fact, destroying greed, has close affinity

\textsuperscript{16} ibid., p. 124.

\textsuperscript{17} See, Jer. 22: 13-4: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbour serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages; who says 'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,' and cuts out windows for it, panelling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion."

\textsuperscript{18} ibid., p. 121.
with the sayings of Jesus regarding discipleship, (e.g. Mt 16.24). This is not meant to suggest that Christian discipleship and the Buddha's doctrine of destruction of greed are identical. Rather, Koyama is suggesting that there is a certain spiritual correspondence between Jesus' teaching on discipleship and the Buddha's doctrine of the destruction of greed. "The Buddha speaks about the destruction of greed which moves in the same direction with Christian self-denial." In other words, Jesus' words find correspondence in the Buddhist doctrine of conditional arising.

Hence in the correspondence of the two messages, the historical character of Buddhism is revealed. What is apparent is that the fundamental message of Buddhism is not simply concerned about nirvana outside of history. It makes a strong call for elimination of human greed, historical greed. And in that concern to overcome greed, Buddhism stands on common ground with Christianity.

Koyama shows that the Buddhist orientation toward history is clearly demonstrated in both major branches of Buddhism. First, in the Theravada tradition, the admonition to fight

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19 Ibid., p. 122.

20 This latter says, to attain nirvana, one must live intelligently according to the teaching of the Buddha. Life under the instruction of the Buddha involves the battle against human greed.

21 Theravada Buddhism is monastic. The word Theravada means the 'way' (vada) of the Elders or monks (thera). Historically, it is one of the several sects collectively called 'Hinayana' or 'Lesser Vehicle' because fewer people were able to follow this way. Hinayana basically represents one particular response to the historical Buddha. The Theravada-Hinayana definition of Buddhism was elaborated largely by monks who sought to follow the Buddha to
against human greed finds expression in the monastic movement. Here monks are subjected to a life of strict discipline based on 227 injunctions. The first four of these prohibitions are called "suffering defeats." They are so decisively unacceptable to the achievement of nirvana that for a monk to be defeated in any one of them means expulsion from the monastery. The fact that these four basically have to do with human greed is an indication of the historical concern of Buddhism. Koyama believes there is a positive interaction between the Buddhist monastic life and history. What the Buddhist monastic life-style expresses is the religious life of self-discipline and self-denial. The main emphasis is on deep historical involvement.  


22 The four 'suffering defeats' prohibit (i) sexual intercourse, (ii) taking anything worth more than five 'masok' (= a negligible amount, like five cents) without the owner's consent, (iii) murder, (iv) falsely claiming to possess the highest truth. These four defeats are basically to do with human greed. To some extent they resemble the Mosaic prohibitions in Exodus 20.

23 The first prohibition - sexual intercourse - for instance, may appear to be aimed at distancing one from the reality of history. But when viewed from the Buddhist perspective of achieving nirvana, then the proscription of sexuality reveals a somewhat similar character to Jesus' teaching about discipleship (Mtt. 16: 24).
Secondly, in the grace religion of Buddhism, (Mahayana) the fight to overcome greed also finds expression. Grace religion within Buddhism, like Christianity, combines in it the affirmation of grace and ethical responsibility. This means that salvation would not come easy. Rather it would mean a more involved and painful experience of history.

In the biblical tradition, no identification between human greed and the mind of God is found. It is clearly indicated that God does not approve human lust or greed. At the same time God is ever creating new possibilities within human history for the restoration and re-creation of humanity. (c.f. Jer. 31.33) To the Israelites, this is God's grace. Yet this grace does not cancel out ethical responsibility for them. They must live practising the law of God which was placed in their minds by God. This combination of grace and ethics does not present us with an easy salvation but with a more deeply painful historical experience.

In Hosea's words, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim!" ... (11. 8-9), we are presented with a picture of a 'helpless' God in the face of human greed; helpless because of profound love for Israel. This is the painful 'helpless' depth of biblical grace and ethics. This is the way God experiences history. Here the profound character of the grace religion reveals

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24 Mahayana Buddhism (= the "Greater Vehicle" because it is the Way for the many) is another variant response to the historical Buddha. This developed from the side both of popular devotion and meditative insight and emphasized the compassion of the Buddha for the salvation of all beings. In the Mahayana tradition, enlightenment is only instrumental to a larger end. c.f. Peter D. Bishop, Words in World Religions, (London: SCM, 1979), pp. 68-69.
itself." Biblical ethics, Koyama points out, is not an independent concept. It is rooted in the nature of God who is involved in history. Inevitably then, history is the confusing interaction between grace and ethics. History continues because God continues to be in search of humanity. This search, the secret of grace and ethics, takes place in history."


Now, having discussed the core-message of Buddhism in relation to the biblical faith, Koyama concludes that both Buddhism and the biblical faith share the same concern about greed. And since both urge us to struggle against human greed, both faiths involve us inescapably in the experience of history.

Koyama is aware that there is a fundamental difference between the Buddhist view of history and that of Christianity. In Buddhism, there is no discussion of the 'helplessness' of the Buddha as we find in the Christian understanding centred on the gracious God. The final word about history lies with humanity according to Buddhist teaching. Nevertheless, whilst Buddhism does not speak about a 'helpless Buddha,' Koyama claims that its emphasis on human greed "demonstrates the

25 MFMS, p. 125.

simpler, yet serious understanding of history." That is to say, even if Buddhism does not interpret history in relation to God as Christianity does, Buddhism does offer a genuine and valid way of looking at history.

To view history as the history of human greed, and to see one's religious goal as the elimination of greed is a simple understanding of history yet no less serious than the Christian view. The Buddhist emphasis on overcoming greed really means that history must be experienced responsibly by every individual person. Through adherence to the 'Conditional Arising' and holding fast to the Four Noble Truths, one must battle diligently against one's own greed and attain enlightenment (salvation) with one's own power and insight. Buddhist enlightenment, based on the elimination of human greed is therefore not a vain exercise but a truly "meaningful spiritual attainment" for Buddhists.²⁸

For Koyama, this Buddhist admonition to battle against human greed is where Buddhism makes a tremendous contribution to humanity and therefore ought to be appreciated by Christians. He believes that the ethics suggested by the Buddhist message is not foreign to the biblical ethics and therefore can contribute to our understanding and interpretation of the Christian message concerning God's love towards all humanity.

The Buddhist goal of overcoming human greed means fighting against all demonic powers which give rise to

²⁷ MFMS, p. 126.
²⁸ ibid., p. 237.
problems of social injustice, violence and the breakdown of peaceful human relationships. It provides another way of understanding reality, forcing upon people the much needed sense of historical responsibility in relation to life within the global human family.

The expression of the fight against greed through the life-style of self-discipline and self-denial is another significant contribution of Buddhism in Koyama's view. As we have mentioned above in connection with the monastic movement, the expression of the religious life for the Buddhist is through self-denial. This is fundamental to Buddhist spirituality. Here, Buddhism not only holds forth a challenge, but it becomes a source of inspiration for religious faith. Koyama thinks that this orientation toward self-discipline "may be one of the important elements that contributes to make a religion a universal religion." 29

Finally, Koyama's interpretation of the Buddhist goal centred on the elimination of greed leads him to assert that the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity is not to be sought in terms of 'true or false religion.' Instead, it must be seen in terms of "two different yet intertwined understandings of the history of human greed." 30

29 ibid., p. 125.
30 ibid., p. 128.
B. The Idolatry of Greed in Modern Technology.

Greed and idolatry are closely linked in Koyama's thought. This link is brought out in connection with the discussion of the theme of modernization in terms of the impact of technology upon traditional cultures and spirituality. An outstanding feature of the modern era is its orientation on technology which is characterized by an emphasis on efficiency or speed.

Efficiency is the spirit of the technological civilization. Motor-cycles, automobiles, aeroplanes, telegrams, communication satellites.... A technology that breeds inefficiency is not worthy of its name.

Koyama claims that the coming of highly efficient science-based technology has occasioned a conflict between 'efficiency' and 'meaning.' And this is a challenge humanity has to ponder over.

Reflecting on modern technological civilization in the light of the Christian gospel, Koyama proposes that one of the ways we commit idolatry is through subjugating meaning to efficiency by the power of human greed. Through greed, people are led to the idolatrous position of subjecting the meaning of human life to technological efficiency, thinking that scientific technology has the final word on human life. To put it differently, when what it means to be human becomes subjected to technological efficiency through greed, then we

31 NHC, p. 2; WBT, p. 49; MFMS, chapter 11.
32 WBT, p. 65; See also, 3MHG, p. 6.
33 MFMS, p. 129.
are engaged in idolatry. In this situation, we naturally become disrespectful in our relationship with the 'holy' God.

1. Technological Efficiency and Salvation.

Traditionally, religion has been viewed as the meeting point of God and human beings. Understood mainly in terms of the experience and expression of the sacred, religion has been seen as the locus where people found the meaning of human existence. Throughout human civilization, religion has functioned as the centre of the universe for the religious person. There, truth and the meaning of life is found. All reality is interpreted in the light of this experience of the centre. Religion therefore is context in which salvation, an inherent promise of religion itself, is made possible.

However, in Koyama’s observation, the present cultural environment of technology has, through its astounding

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34 Peter Berger and John Luckmann have endorsed this view. From a sociological perspective, they describe religion as a 'plausibility structure,' a sacred canopy stretched over the network of social institutions by which human beings explain and justify the social order. It is religion which provides an 'over-arching symbolic universe of meaning' for the 'legitimation' of reality and for the interpretation and integration with the world. See, Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann: The Social Construction of Reality: a treatise in the sociology of Knowledge, (Allen Lane: Penguin, 1967).

35 Religious symbols are expressions of this truth. The cross and the wheel have become central symbols for the Christian and Buddhist experience respectively. To the religious person, symbols are relevant because they convey the meaning and express the fundamental reality of the truth.
performance, posed a grave challenge for religion." There is a tension between what he calls "salvation by technology and salvation by religion." For many people in the modern world, technology has in fact become a religion in the sense that it holds forth a promise of salvation. "To live in technological efficiency may become for many the experience of salvation." This suggests that technology with its amazing efficiency is bound to replace (if it has not already) the meaning that humanity has traditionally found in religion.

Technology, states Koyama, arises from an efficient administrative 'image-writing' upon nature, derived from the inspiration received by the human mind through perception of the orderliness of the cosmos, that is, the mysterious unity of 'eikon' (image) and 'logos' (rational explanation) in the cosmos. It is this kind of enlightenment which creates enormous efficiency on the basis of image and word of the cosmos. Technology produces fertilizer to 'increase' and 'enhance' the productivity of the ground. That is, it makes the ground more efficient. By creating efficiency, technology produces the possibility of an enlightened relationship with the cosmos. In this sense, efficiency is enlightenment. Koyama claims that this is the fundamental message of technology to

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36 Today, it is not religion but science-based technology which can put a person in Auckland in immediate contact with another in Australia. It is not religion but medical technology which is able to save the lives of seemingly hopeless patients.

37 MFMS, p. 131.

38 WBT, p. 65.

39 MFMS, p. 131.
humanity. And to confess that efficiency is enlightenment is to become religious in the technological sense.

Technological enhancement is, however, ambiguous. It has the ability to rebel against the cosmological eikon and logos. Technology can be creative or destructive to the human habitat, the cosmos. It makes the field greener by the administration of fertilizer and it also places humanity under the threat of destruction through nuclear power. But the ability to enhance or destroy humanity lies not with technology itself, but in the way we make use of the technology we have produced. This is the point where greed usually manifests itself.

Technology is a product of the human creative spirit. But this creative spirit of humanity has its origin in the creative Spirit of God. In this respect, technology is of God; it is part of God's design and purpose for the redemption of the world. (Eph. 1.10) It is therefore a divine gift. As an agent or a 'servant' in God's employment, technology has no authority of its own. Since it exists and functions solely in the service of God's creative and redemptive purpose for humankind, its efficiency may not be salvific for humanity. Technology and all that is good about it has come to being only because God, who "was in Christ personally reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5.19) has issued the invitation.⁴⁰ In other words, technology has its source in God who is Creator and Redeemer of the world.

⁴⁰ WBT, p. 69.
Yet, as a servant of God, technology is not inherently destructive to human well-being. But when technology is used to serve human greed, Koyama claims, its compounded efficiency will certainly impoverish and destroy the meaning of human life. Technology becomes a danger to humanity's welfare only when human beings misuse it. Used by human greed, technology will destroy humanity. The result of such misuse is that we no longer have technology in our hands but technology has us in its hand. It is precisely in this preposterous situation that we are engaged in idolatry.

We become idolatrous when technology is no longer seen to be a means to an end but an end in itself. As soon as we begin to put technology before "justice and righteousness", (c.f. Jer. 22. 3-5) then we immediately become worshippers of technology. When technological efficiency decides the meaning of human life, "when efficiency becomes the 'arch-value' in our lives," then we have idolatry of technology. "Idolatry means that meaning is in the hands of efficiency." Does this mean that technological efficiency ought to be shunned totally?

Efficiency, Koyama points out, is not a bad thing. It is a positive value which goes back to the blessing of God upon humankind. (Gen. 1.28). But it is here, at this point of positive value of efficiency and humanity's efficiency-mindedness, that humanity is, strangely enough, tempted to fail to hear and understand the Word of God. Why?

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" ibid. p. 65.

" MFMS, p. 135.
Because to the eyes of the efficiency-minded human beings, the Word of God is inefficient. Because the Word of God sounds archaic and empty, and because the salvation offered by God is 'intangible' compared to the tangibility of salvation through technology. However, Koyama claims that while the Word of God is inefficient, it is precisely in that inefficiency that humanity finds the real meaning of life. Through the inefficiency of the Word of God, salvation is made possible for all. What does he mean by the 'inefficiency of the Word of God'? How is it salvific for humanity?

2. The Inefficiency of the Cross:

For Koyama, the inefficiency of the Word of God is Love. The Word of God communicates the love of God. The love of God means God's resolution to love humanity although this may call for supreme sacrifice on God's behalf and even when such sacrifice may have to be implemented by inconvenient and inefficient processes. Because God is love, God is always prepared to operate in human affairs 'inefficiently'. This truth is conveyed to us by the bible. He cites Deuteronomy 8. 2-4 as a classic example.

"And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your father know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your feet did not
In his interpretation of this passage, he draws the insight that God's readiness to operate inefficiently in human history is proof that God's love is genuine. In other words, God's love proves itself by working its way in history without any magic formula, easy quick ways, or 'technologically efficient ways.' Surely, God could have acted far more majestically and with amazing efficiency because God is Lord of history, the Almighty King of kings. God could have led Israel with 'supersonic speed' and thereby avoided the inconveniences and inefficiencies of 'slow walking'. Yet God did not choose that efficient way. The reason for this choice, says Koyama, is because God is Love. If God had chosen to act with efficient speed with Israel, it would only have enhanced God's own glory before the eyes of the world.

Hence, for 40 years, God wandered with the Israelites in the wilderness in order to establish the meaning of their covenant relationship. For 40 years, God became a nomad so that the Israelites may learn that 'man does not live by bread (technology) alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord'. (Deut. 8.1-4). This obviously was a slow and costly process. Yet in spite of all the hazards and inefficient set-backs, God remained faithful to the Israelites, walking slowly with them, protecting them and providing for their needs. God remained ever faithful, ever-loving, ever-forgiving. This is how God relates and engages with all humanity, says Koyama.

swell these forty years."
God walks 'slowly' because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love.

In Jesus Christ, we see the ultimate and full revelation of God's love for all people. On the cross, Jesus' mobility was slowed down to a complete standstill. Nailed to the cross, his walking pace reached a full stop. Yet he refused to come down from the cross because of his love for this sinful world. (Rom. 5.8).

The cross of Jesus thus becomes for Koyama, the manifestation of God's efficiency. He writes,

Going through a most inefficient process, he proved himself to be the most efficient One. ... His efficiency is not, however, an ordinary efficiency. It is the efficiency in a great paradox, the efficiency of the Crucified One!

In other words, through the cross - an inefficient means, technologically speaking - God's love through Christ proves to be most efficient. Through total involvement with humanity, even to the point of suffering death on the cross, Jesus reveals the efficiency of God's love. He reveals "God's proper work of forgiving, saving and life-giving." This is Salvation.

The cross therefore, as a symbol of God's efficiency in Christ, proves to be salvific for humankind. The cross becomes

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45 3MHG, p. 7.
46 WBT, pp. 68-9.
the centre in which the theological meaning of life is appropriated and comprehended. In this 'crucified efficiency' is hidden new life for the great issues we face within the framework of technological civilization, the problems of development, social justice, crisis of faith and search for the meaning of life. For Koyama, crucified efficiency teaches us that technological efficiency needs to be enlightened by the sense of the 'efficiency' of the Crucified Jesus. The efficiency of technology needs to be placed within the context of love and social concern. Within that context, technological efficiency "will make a meaningful and peaceful contribution to humanity." Judged by the love of God revealed in the Cross, technology can be an invaluable asset to the well-being of humanity. The efficiency of technology finds its true value in the efficiency of the crucified God.

3. Subjugation of meaning to Technological efficiency is destructive.

As we pointed out in another chapter, the idolatry of technology means that technology is 'boosted' to the realm of the unconditional, to use the words of Paul Tillich. It means technology becomes absolutized. But by absolutizing technology, we in fact throw away our own human dignity and subject it to the symbol of efficiency. According to Koyama, it is usually the power of greed that motivates us to take such a disrespectful attitude towards our own human dignity. Similarly the power of human greed leads human beings to take

"3MHG, p. 143."
a reckless and disrespectful attitude towards God. "Disrespectful approach to the holy is called greed." Through greed, human beings often fall into the mistake of treating God with a 'technological mind.' That is, a mind which thinks that God can be controlled and manipulated to one's advantage and design.

The technological mind, in the grasp of human greed, falls into the sin of 'taking the name of God in vain'. Often in seeking to gain control over things and others, the technological mind takes the name of God vainly by using it to sanction its greedy schemes. In so doing, the technological mind is in fact putting a rein on God. And this is idolatrous.

Technology, reflects Koyama, stands for power of control. But as far as God's power is concerned, that cannot be handled with technological efficiency. Salvation cannot be efficiently controlled because the power of God, symbolized by the cross, is 'handle-less'. And as soon as human beings try to handle and control the power of God, the meaning of God becomes subjugated to technological efficiency. This is idolatry. And this is what Koyama means by a 'reckless approach to God'. Such a disrespectful approach to God is

49 MFMS, p. 135.

50 NHC, p. 3: A technological mind is, in short, 'handle-minded.'

51 ibid., p. 2. The image of a lunch-box with a 'handle' conveys this truth about technology. 'Handle' stands for means of efficient control. Automobiles with powerful engines obey us because we control them through the handle (steering wheel). Doors can be efficiently controlled if we operate them by their handles. Technology therefore aims at handling and controlling all physical power efficiently.
dangerous. It leads to our own destruction. (c.f. Rom. 1.28f).

4. Technological Efficiency and Militarism.

The subjugation of meaning to technological efficiency is most obvious in the area of military technology. A World War II submarine could sink only passing ships; now a single sub can destroy 160 cities as far away as 4000 miles. Nuclear missiles can go from western Europe to Moscow in 6 minutes. Yet apart from that incredible speed, it adds very little to the meaning of human life. Koyama contrasts the speed of nuclear missiles with the average rural housewife in Africa who still walks several hours a day for the family's water supply. He claims that the walk of the African housewife contributes more to human meaning than the incredible efficiency of the missiles that can travel a great distance within a few minutes. How is this so?

Walking is the speed at which people are able to encounter, understand and communicate with others thus enriching and encouraging human community. At walking pace, people are able to meet, engage and live in meaningful relationships. In these human relationships, we meet with God who comes to people at the walking speed of 'three miles an hour.' Koyama says,

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3MHG, Chapter. 1: Koyama places much emphasis on this image of God as a 'slow God.' God does not move at supersonic speed when God is involved with people. Because God is love, God 'walks slowly.'
When we see, feel, smell and hear people we are not lonely. Our life is enriched and encouraged. ... Walking means 'meeting people' (be among people). The more speed our life becomes the more lonely we become.\(^{33}\)

The missile (technological efficiency) on the other hand, represents what Koyama calls the 'speed-above weather' style of modern life. Concerned more with material things and without much thought about human relationships with others, such a life leads to loneliness and spiritual impoverishment. The missile, which is a symbol of global militarism and nuclearism contributes nothing to the meaning of human life. It only adds to the frustration of humanity living under the constant threat of cosmic destruction.

Global militarism, claims Koyama, is one of the most "terrifying expressions of insensitivity" in the present day.\(^{34}\) In the face of grave poverty, starvation, diseases, malnutrition, illiteracy etc, among millions of people, mostly in Third World countries, the super-powers engage in building immense military arsenals, with some $200 billion going to the production of military machines every year.\(^{35}\) Even Third World countries themselves saw it necessary to spend billions of dollars on arms.\(^{36}\) Such insensitivity! Spending money on armament at a gigantic scale, in the face of needy neighbours, 

\(^{33}\) 50M, pp. 149-150.

\(^{34}\) 3MHG, p. 127.

\(^{35}\) ibid., p. 29; WBT, p. 68.

\(^{36}\) In 1977, the Third World spent the staggering sum of $40.1 billion for the procurement of arms. See, 3MHG, p. 127.
is not only a 'big waste,'\textsuperscript{57} but it is 'immoral.'\textsuperscript{58}

Militarism is immoral because it threatens the quality of human life, destroys human values, cripples historical identity and ruins human integrity. "Militarism, in great and small scales, is the power that tries to destroy the human contents of life."\textsuperscript{59} In other words, militarism in whatever form is a threat to the meaning of human life.

In Koyama's observation, the threat of militarism has already materialized. Whilst we are 'educated,' 'modern,' 'scientific' and technologically efficient, we are today feeling a profound sense of 'spiritual uneasiness.'\textsuperscript{60} Relationships between people and nations are being frustrated. Today we live in a 'fear-civilization'; a civilization where fear is a reality influencing history and the political organizations of nations.\textsuperscript{61} All this goes to show that the efficiency of military technology is destroying the health and integrity (shalom) of humankind.\textsuperscript{62}

When the meaning of human life is subjugated to technological efficiency, the outcome is usually suffering, destruction and the break-up of human community. Militarism, as an expression of this subjugation of meaning to efficiency

\textsuperscript{57} 50M, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{58} 3MHG, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{59} ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{60} NHC, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{62} 3MHG, p. 127.
demonstrates this. In spite of the nine trillion dollars that the world has spent most efficiently for 'defence', world security appears to have diminished rather than strengthened. The more we have spent on efficient military equipment, the more precarious we have become. The more we have poured money into arms in the name of humanization, the faster we have dehumanized ourselves. As to the root of all this, Koyama places it in the power of 'greed.'

When humanity is in the grasp of human greed, human values becomes subservient to technological efficiency. Greed blinds human minds. It violates human dignity and produces dehumanization. "Technological efficiency in the hand of human greed is causing the life-and-death situation the world today." It destroys human well-being and brings despair to the world.

Koyama believes that greed is tragically present in the composition of human history. Being an integral part of human history, greed has been, is, and always will be a demonic influence in the life of humanity. In the contemporary world, the power of human greed has infiltrated all human systems whether political, economic or even religious. All are caught in the net of human greed. It is not difficult to detect the presence of greed, for instance, in capitalism, communism, racism and militarism. He points to the 'apartheid policy of South Africa,' the Queensland Act of 1965 concerning

63 MFMS, p. 140.
64 ibid., p. 108.
65 NHC, p. 59.
'The Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs,'\textsuperscript{66} Hitler's National Socialism,\textsuperscript{67} as a few examples of human movements which come out of what he calls the 'greed-spirituality.'\textsuperscript{68}

The result of such greed-spirituality has been devastating: oppression, poverty, aggression, violence, marginalization, dehumanization, etc. It has led to the creation of many forms of idols, thus creating the wrong kind of relationship between human beings and God. However, once we are aware of the evils of human greed in history and begin to fight against it, then we are, in effect, working in accord with the mind of the history-concerned God of the Bible. One of the tasks of Christian theology therefore is to be aware of the power of human greed and be prepared to criticise it.

C. Greed In The History Of Japan.

Critical awareness of human greed provides Koyama with an appropriate perspective for a critical examination of modern technological society. Greed becomes for him a theological key for interpreting, in particular, the modern history of Japan with its imperialism, emperor-worship, westernization, postwar democracy and prosperity. Before we examine Koyama's interpretation of Japanese history, let us consider first his definition of greed.

\textsuperscript{66} 3MHG, p. 133.

\textsuperscript{67} NHC, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{68} ibid., p. 60.
What is human greed?

Basic to Koyama's understanding of Greed is the principle of 'increase' which he identifies as the centre of Baal spirituality. He writes, "The politics of Baal is directed towards the idea of 'increase'; economic, political, psychological, cultural and religious self-centred gain." This principle is also derived from the definition of the Greek 'pleonexia' (Greed) which means first of all 'having more,' then 'receiving more,' and finally 'wanting more.' Greed therefore basically means a passionate quest to acquire more for oneself. It is an insatiable drive toward 'self-increase.' The principle of 'increase,' applied to such things as power, material wealth, prestige, glory, worth, in relation to the 'self' forms the basic structure of human greed.

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69 This principle is derived mainly from the 'Baal fertility cult' found in the Old Testament. Based on his interpretation of 1 Kings 15-18, Koyama defines 'Baal' as a personification of the power of fertility. It represents both human and cosmic fertility or the potentiality to increase. It is an expression of vitality. It also contains the principle of development. Thus the principle of Baal is not harmful to the human community as long as it means simply the principle of increase. But Baal does not stay this way. Baal becomes the power of lust to increase. It is used for lust, greed. In the bible, the power of Baal to bring fertility to the land (according to Canaanite cult) did not just stay within the realm of nature. It eventually challenges Yahweh's sovereignty over other situations as well. Baal did not remain just a rain god. It became a demonic idol used to fan religious fanaticism to the extent of promoting human sacrifice (c.f. Jer. 19.5) Baal proved destructive to the life of the Israelites. See, 3MHG, p. 19; NHC, p. 116; "Covenant: Some Issues," p. 170.

70 MFMS, p. 216.

71 ibid., p. 108.
The increase of self is the most fascinating of all human experience. 'My' increase makes me feel more secure, more righteous, more authentic, more religious, more divine.\textsuperscript{2}

Hence expressions such as self-aggrandizement,\textsuperscript{3} self-importance,\textsuperscript{4} self-love,\textsuperscript{5} self-enlargement, self-glorification,\textsuperscript{6} self-centred gain,\textsuperscript{7} are frequently found in Koyama's writings.

Intricately bound up with Koyama's definition of greed is the concept of human freedom. Freedom, claims Koyama, is the human quality that affords a description of what it means to be human being. "To be a human' means, 'freedom' from 'sub-human' and 'inhuman.' Any tendency towards the direction of 'sub-human' and 'inhuman' threatens 'to be human.'"\textsuperscript{8}

Fundamentally, a human being is a 'spiritual being' at the core of whom is the freedom to be what (s)he chooses to be.\textsuperscript{9}

Freedom is the inner quality which makes up the centre of the human personality. And without freedom, a person becomes less

\textsuperscript{2} ibid., p. 216.
\textsuperscript{3} "Covenant: Some Issues," p. 171; NHC, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{4} 3MHG, pp. 13-15.
\textsuperscript{5} ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{6} ibid., p. 126.
\textsuperscript{7} MFMS, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{8} S6M, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{9} Koyama says that whether one moves in the direction of creation or destruction, that is, whether one is creative or destructive, one inevitably acts spiritually, asking the question of meaning, the question of being human and the question of ever becoming more human. "Being human, 'being spiritual' and 'seeking meaning' are interchangeable." See, Kosuke Koyama, "The Mad Man Sits Down," SEAJT, Vol. 14, no. 2 (1973), p. 4.
than human.

Freedom, mysteriously, refuses to be controlled externally; it refuses, as it were, to be 'nailed down.' Also, freedom has the property of either being used properly or abused. Whenever that freedom is used irresponsibly, that is an indication of the presence of greed. This is because "at its core, human greed is a misuse of human freedom."

Greed misuses human freedom when the will to increase one's self is exercised without regard for the human dignity of others. That is to say, to use one's freedom for self-gain at the expense of the freedom of others, thus reducing others to the level of 'sub-human' or 'inhuman' is a misuse of human freedom. Koyama believes that greed is often propelled by self-interest or self-righteousness. Motivated thus, it always breeds violence or self-serving power which is detrimental to the life of human communities and the well-being of humanity. Since greed always results in aggression, violence and the disruption of human life, it is by definition irresponsible. In the history of Japan, the irresponsibility born out of greed has repeatedly manifested itself.

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80 MFMS, p. 107.
81 3MHG, pp. 138-140.
82 MFMS, p. 110.
Eighth-century Japan for example, Koyama recalls, was a time of dehumanization for the peasants. They were exploited by the aristocratic class. Their labours were conscripted; heavy taxes were laid upon them, and they were required to present to their rulers, at specified times, their allocation of silk. The building of the imposing temple to house the immense image of the Buddha by the emperor Shomu in 747 did not help much to reduce this state of human exploitation. In fact the cost of building the image itself only became a source of added affliction upon the people, especially the poor. While the benevolent image of the solar Buddha was being built, poverty and hunger continued to increase. The words of a Japanese poet expressed this situation poignantly: "No fire sends up smoke in the cooking place. And in the cauldron, a spider spins its web," because there is no grain to cook. \(^{83}\)

Similarly in the ancient history of Israel, Koyama claims that the temple of King Solomon was built on just such exploitation. \(^{84}\) Both these historical examples taken from the world of Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai illustrate that greed is irresponsible because it has no compunction about using others for one's own glory. Both emperor Shomu and King Solomon had

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\(^{83}\) Yamanoue no Okura (7th cent.), quoted by Koyama, ibid. pp. 103-4.

\(^{84}\) "King Solomon raised a levy of forced labour out of all Israel; and the levy numbered thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month in relays. ... Solomon also had seventy thousand burden-bearers and eighty thousand hewers of stone in the hill country." (1 Kings 5. 13-15).
freedom not to exploit the labour of the masses to accomplish their aim, yet they chose to place a great number of people under forced labour. They chose to enhance themselves by subjecting the people to hunger and poverty. Increase for two was thus bought at the cost of reducing the people’s humanity to a state of inhumanity. For emperor and king to increase, whole populations had to suffer loss of human freedom and injury to human dignity. Such grave misuse of human freedom!

Moreover, since the building projects of both Shomu and Solomon were carried out in the name of religion, these examples show how the religious edifice (religious symbolism) can by itself become the occasion for oppression in human history. Caught by the snares of greed, even the world of religions can – and often does – violate human dignity and cause injury to social well-being of human communities. The modern history of Japan exemplifies this more intensely.

2. Imperial Absolutism.

Prior to the 19th century, Japan had been a 'closed nation' to the rest of the world. Under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867), government policies were based on Confucian political and social theories where the principle of heaven, harmonious relationship between the rulers and the ruled, and even the value of the individual person were emphasized. In the middle of the 19th century (1868), however, a fundamental change took place. A new Constitutional System based on the

*ibid.* p. 190.
national ideology of imperial absolutism came into force. Under this new system, the Meiji emperor became divinized. Article III of the 1889 Constitution has the following words:

... the Emperor holds His power from heaven through the medium of His glorious ancestors, but not from any human authorization or concession; consequently He cannot be held responsible to His subjects, but to Heaven alone. ... In virtue of His inviolability, the Emperor is subject to no human force on the part of His subjects."

By being 'subject to no human force' meant that the emperor was in effect, a god. Sanctioned by the authority of 'Heaven alone,' the emperor became an absolute monarch. Consequently the concepts of 'heaven' and 'people' became no longer related.

According to Koyama, the radical change in the politics of Japan was forced upon her from the outside. After over 200 years of isolation Japan was suddenly brought into direct confrontation with the powerful nations of the world in the form of the United States. Frightened by what she saw, she decided to imitate the powerful nations, to modernize and to achieve in the shortest time possible the status of a strong nation. Under the slogan, 'Wealthy Nation Strong Army,' all her power resources were brought under total mobilization.

"ibid., p. 192.

"In 1952 a US naval expedition under the charge of Matthew C. Perry, commissioned by President Millard Fillmore to open Japanese ports to US ships, arrived in Japan with four battleships. Perry pressured the Japanese to receive a letter from the President. After surveying Tokyo Bay, Perry left, promising to return the following year to receive the reply to the presidential letter. In 1854, Perry returned and was able to force the shogunate to sign a treaty of commerce. Koyama appears to suggest that this event played a significant part in Japan's movement toward imperialism and westernization. MFMS. p. 190."
With this Meiji Constitution, imperial absolutism was imposed upon people of Japan but not without serious social strain. The new imperial system generated artificial and coerced dedication to the emperor. People were coerced to make incredible sacrifices, even to the sacrifice of life itself. With minimal human rights, they were pressed into the dangerous fanaticism of emperor-worship and militarism.

Under imperial control, the concept of human freedom lost its essential meaning. Military personnel were forced not to be concerned about public opinion and politics but only to execute orders from the emperor himself. Consequently, the imperial system of armed force moved Japan toward aggression against other nations. Simultaneously, the army was used to suppress civil insurrection and local resistance against conscription. The whole system of education and its content was controlled to advance the national goal of 'Wealthy Nation Strong Army.' In matters of religion, all religious traditions were forced to submit to the national ideology. As a result, Shintoism was established as the official state religion.

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88 ibid., p. 193.

89 Teachers and educationists were prohibited from discussing political concerns but only to propagate submission to imperial rule and to enhance the glory of the empire.

Concomitant with the establishment of imperial absolutism is the process of Westernization of Japan. This is not the same as modernization since a structure with the ideology of the imperial cult at the centre cannot be rightly called modernization. Rather, Westernization for Japan was:

militarization, preparation to defend herself and eventually to carry out massive aggression. Japanese leaders saw that their armaments must be Westernized if they were to stand up to the challenge of the West. All the people and the resources of the nation were mobilized to achieve the national aim of 'Wealthy Nation Strong Army.'

Such a change of course in Koyama's observation was totally irresponsible. For westernization was accompanied by a great deal of dehumanization, and it led Japan on a path to self-destruction. Hijacked by a powerful government centred on a 'human who was beyond human,' the nation was exploited brutally and suffered immensely. 'Wealthy Nation' was for the few, 'Strong Army' was to suppress her own people.

Two military victories, over China in 1895 and Russia in 1905, established Japan as a military nation. But the success of war against other nations only brought harm and despair to the nation. The colonization of Taiwan (1896) and Korea (1910) convinced the militarists that they were now masters of Asia and that the way to national greatness through military might was confirmed. Yet in that conviction Japan was eventually led to suffer the terrible devastation of 1945.

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90 ibid., p. 196.
Here then in the imperialism, absolutism and westernization of Japan, Koyama discerns the ugly face of greed. Motivated by a self-centred national ideology, the imperial court embarked on a programme of self-aggrandizement. It sought to increase and enhance her national glory at the price of dehumanizing the Japanese population. Human freedom, human rights and the well-being of the people became questions of inconsiderable significance. In effect, human life itself became subservient to the idol of imperial absolutism. In her quest for power and self-glorification, Japan sought to 'increase' her military might in ways that necessitated the oppression of her own people.

Such a political system is idolatrous because it was based on a self-righteous ideology which, from the point view of the biblical faith, amounted to taking the name of God 'in vain'. Through manipulation and 'handling,' Japanese leaders used the name of God for their own self-increase. Like a mechanical device one can efficiently control, the name of God was used to enhance their own prestige and power. In this respect, the imperial cult of Japan has something in common with the Baal fertility cult which the Biblical God denounces (c.f. Jer. 19.15). Both share the 'increase orientation.'

Increase as a mere principle is not at all idolatrous. As a matter of fact, the God of the bible does not condemn increase. But when increase is "achieved by the suppression or oppression of parts of the community", then it becomes idolatrous. In other words, only when increase is seen to be

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9 ibid., p. 216.
of a higher value than that of human life itself does it become demonic. No longer is it just simply increase; it becomes the 'lust' to increase or greed."\(^2\)

The demand for human sacrifice is what Koyama considers to be the most extreme form of human oppression. All versions of the imperial cult make this demand in one way or another. For this reason he calls it the cult of Moloch.\(^3\) For the imperial leaders to demand the lives of millions of her own people in order to enhance the glory of the nation is atrocious and totally unjustifiable. Such a demand is a first degree act of human injustice. And it is an act which the God of the Bible abhors.

In the biblical faith, to increase oneself by means of decreasing others' humanity is a grave insult to God. It is a preposterous arrangement because it desecrates that which is sacred in humanity. Oppression, (dehumanization, alienation etc.) is a blasphemy against the deepest level of human identity. It injures the centre of humanity. Humankind began to live, says the Bible, by the breath of God. It lives by the inspiration of God. In other words, God is the source of human dignity. "To be human means to live with God."\(^4\) Any injury to the integrity of humankind is therefore an affront to God.

As we have already seen, Koyama understands what it means 'to be human' in terms of 'freedom from sub-human and

\(^2\) NHC, p. 116.

\(^3\) Refer, Lev. 18: 20. 2-5; 1 Kings 11: 7; 2 Kings 23: 10; Jer. 32: 35.

\(^4\) 3MHG, p. 134, 139.
inhuman.' But this is not all. Human life is a life in relation to other human beings. It is a life of peaceful relationships "with our neighbour." This is what constitutes the essence of being human. "To live in human relationship with other men is the substance of 'to be human'." Oppression, exploitation, dehumanization, etc, therefore, are not human relationships but the experience of sub-human and inhuman relationship. Rooted in human greed, these can only lead to violence. They threaten, injure and destroy human dignity. They subject people to a life of 'un-freedom' and reduce them to a status of being sub-human or inhuman. They violate true human relationships.

From the perspective of the cross, Koyama points to love as the true basis for meaningful human relationships. Real human relationship, he asserts, "means a relationship of 'love your neighbour as yourself'." And in the same vein, human freedom means "freedom to love one's neighbour." In other words, only through love can a person create a 'peaceful relationship' with another; a relationship where human dignity is respected and affirmed. And where love is at work, there, the character of human freedom reveals itself. For only when one loves someone is one ready to be 'nailed down.'"

"ibid., p. 138.

"50M, p. 41.

"ibid., p. 42.

"ibid., p. 46.

"Meditating on John 15.13, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," Koyama points out that a person has the freedom to love and 'lay down
Jesus himself, in his freedom to love others, was ready to be nailed to the cross for the sake of the world. In him, God is revealed as the one who loves us in spite of our rejection. To say that God is history-concerned means that God freely loves humanity; that human integrity is important to God. Since God's self is emphatically involved with human beings in history, God is very much concerned about injury inflicted on human life.

Loss of human integrity, alienation, social injustice, oppression, exploitation, suffering and the like are all matters of deep concern for God. By grace, God in Jesus comes to heal, restore, uphold and sustain human integrity. God's love also involves judgement upon those who injure and destroy human dignity. But this judgement does not mean that humanity is doomed. Rather, it means that in God's judgement, we are saved. Because God is love, God's judgement seeks to re-create humanity so that it may return to God in repentance and obedience.

All this has strong implications for the christian life. In Jesus, Christians are called to participate in God's work of healing and restoration. In Jesus' life and ministry, he carried out the will of his Father, namely, the elimination of all human sinful arrangements which injure others. He focused on the removal of personal alienation and social
injustice from the world, so that human beings can live and create peaceful relationship with each other and with God. This is the commission given to all Christians by virtue of their calling.

4. Democratic Japan.

The defeat of Japan in a war she herself initiated led to an experience of utter desolation. This 'wilderness' experience brought the nation to her knees in repentance and radically changed her attitude toward herself and the world. It forged in her a new spirit; not that of aggression and confrontation but peace and international harmony. The experience also led her to embrace the principle of democracy. This radical change in the politics of Japan is evident in the postwar Constitution of 1947.

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100 3MHG, p. 139.

101 In the Preamble, for example, the nation sincerely pledges her national honour to accomplish the 'high ideals' of democracy, peace and international harmony with all their resources.

"We, the Japanese people, ... determined that we shall secure ... peaceful cooperation with all nations ... and resolved that never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war ... do proclaim that sovereign power resides with the people and do firmly establish this Constitution. ....

We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and deeply conscious of the high ideals controlling human relationship, and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world. We desire to occupy an honoured place in an international society striving for preservation of peace, and the banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time from the earth. ....

We believe that no nation is responsible to itself alone, but that laws of political morality are universal; ... " See, MFMS, pp. 199-200.
According to Koyama, the new Constitution of Japan is really a confession of faith. Reflecting upon the terrible events of 1945, the Japanese people vowed "never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war through the action of government." (Preamble, para. 1) They decided to commit themselves whole-heartedly to the principle of renunciation of war, that is, peace by way of complete disarmament. In so doing, Japan came to depend solely upon the security provided by the Charter of United Nations for disarmament and neutrality. That is to say, Japan put her whole trust in the "justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world." (Preamble, para. 2) It is in this sense that Koyama speaks of the Constitution, as an 'act of faith.'

Article Nine of the Constitution clearly demonstrates the determination of Japanese people to "forever renounce war as sovereign right of the nation." It shows a conviction that

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102 Article One of the Charter of the United Nations reads:
"The purpose of the United Nations are: To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace."

103 MFMS, p. 203.

104 Article Nine of the Constitution reads:
"Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.
In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." ibid., p. 202.
peace would come only by way of disarmament. This, Koyama points out, is a 'realistic ideal' because it is only by way of disarmament that humanity can survive and prosper. The concept of realistic ideal, he claims, is theological since the history-concerned God is the unity of the 'real' and the 'ideal.' Biblical salvation is both real and ideal at the same time. And to respond to the call of such a God produces discipleship on the part of Christians.

Christian discipleship, says Koyama, is based on the real (present) and the ideal (future) as these two are combined in the image of Jesus Christ. Article Nine thus demands the spirit of discipleship. It demands religious commitment of self-discipline. Only through the mind of discipleship can one respond to the 'high ideals' of democracy, peace and international harmony. By the same token, one is able to see that God means to take the risk for peace rather than to take the risk of war, because the 'weakness of God is stronger than men' (1 Cor. 1.25).

Koyama believes that the spirit of the post-war Constitution is congruent with that of the biblical God. The pledge to renounce war for the sake of peaceful relationships among the international community and the conviction that complete disarmament is the way to establish peace and harmony is very much in line with message of the christian gospel.

The God of the bible revealed through the word of the cross is an impassioned God; one who because of deep concern and love for us, approaches us totally unarmed. For Koyama,  

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105 ibid., p. 205.
the image of the 'broken Christ who heals the broken world'
(I Cor. 11.23-4) expresses the depth of this love of God for
humanity. God in Christ comes to the world in the form of the
broken One. But in that brokenness, God restores humanity and
heals broken human relationships. "In speaking about the
broken Christ, we are speaking about creation, construction,
integration, reconciliation and healing."106

To express this relationship between the broken Christ
and the broken world, Koyama uses two images, namely,
'confrontation' and 'embrace.'107 In confrontation, we oppose
someone externally. The Oxford Dictionary meaning of the word
is 'to adjoin with a mutual frontier.' The Concise Oxford
Dictionary has 'to face in hostility or defiance'. Thus
confrontation implies criticism applied from the outside.
Furthermore, confrontation is a 'linear' concept.108 Since it
is directed to the opposition 'in front,' it continues in a
straight line. It cannot, as it were, come back. Thus, that
which is linear and cannot come back cannot really be broken.
It cannot suffer.

The image of 'broken Christ' is not linear. It is more
circular. It points to the mind that comes back again and

106 ibid., p. 242.
107 ibid., p. 248.
108 ibid., p. 219, 249; refer also to Koyama's article,
"Barefoot in an Ascending Elevator: A Meditation" (Culture and
Religion at the Meeting Point Between the curve-mind and the
straight-mind) in On Language, Culture and Religion: In Honour
of Eugene A. Nida, eds., Matthew Black & William A Smalley,
(Mouton, Paris: The Hague, 1974), where the thought is
implicit that confrontation is a characteristic of the
technological mind, which is 'straight,' 'fast' and
'self-assertive.'
again to seek the healing of broken human relationships. Jesus Christ is the centre of the biblical message for Christians. Yet he establishes his centrality by going to the periphery and giving his life in search of us.\textsuperscript{109} The broken Christ, therefore, does not confront us by direct opposition. Nor does he confront us externally. Confrontation in relation to the name of Jesus Christ is confrontation by "inner persuasion."\textsuperscript{110} This means Christ speaks to us from inside.

For Koyama, 'inner persuasion' is not to be taken as a psychological process but as a historical one. He understands it in terms of Jesus' historical suffering.

Jesus comes to us as he is suffering under Pontius Pilate. This is the theological meaning of 'inner' persuasion. The concept of 'inner' and 'suffering' are inseparable. ... It refers to someone through whose suffering history is renewed.\textsuperscript{111}

In other words, it is through suffering in the actual context of history that we become confronted with the salvific meaning of God in Christ, from within. With regard to the Japanese people, it is the actual experiences of the war that invited them to the name of the living God of the Bible. God continues to confront humanity in the events of history.\textsuperscript{112} The content of the Constitution indicates that the decisive revelation of God in Jesus Christ has taken place in cosmological Japan, persuading people from within and leading them to a new and responsible attitude to history.

\textsuperscript{109} MFMS, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{110} ibid., p. 249.
\textsuperscript{111} ibid., p. 250.
\textsuperscript{112} ibid., p. 207.
So by inner persuasion, Jesus confronts us. Koyama calls this the 'confrontation of embrace.' The broken Christ confronts us with the love of God which, to use Kazoh Kitamori's description, 'embraces us who are not worthy to be embraced.' Confrontation, then, in terms of Koyama's 'theology of the cross' is confrontation through Christ's suffering for the sake of peaceful relations with the opposition. Christ confronts us by embracing us while we are yet hostile and defiant of him. This broken Christ who embraces us is completely unarmed. His way with people is that of total disarmament. Such confrontation is therefore radically different from 'direct confrontation'.

Direct confrontation, Koyama asserts, characterizes the spirit of militarism. Militarism is run by the spirit of efficiency. It confronts the opposition with naked force. Because efficiency is a high priority, continued armament - increase in arms - is always deemed to be a necessary requirement. Such efficient confrontation obviously is aggressive and violent. It certainly cannot help to create harmony and peace in human community. Theology of the Cross, centred on the broken Christ, rejects the military philosophy of direct confrontation. Only the broken Christ can heal, restore and redeem broken human relationship. Confrontation through 'inner persuasion' is the spirit of community building.

\[113\] ibid., p. 248.

\[114\] MFMS, p. 250.
5. Post postwar Constitution.

After only five years of disarmament, (1945-1950) commitment to the 'high ideal' of the new Constitution — peace by complete disarmament — was already being eroded. In 1949, the United States changed its policy toward Japan because of the emergence of Communist China. US government now took up the opposite position to that of the post-war Constitution — 'peace by way of armament.' So already in the early 1950s, then, Japan was being openly urged by United States government to rearm herself.

Although the United States was not entirely responsible for Japan's change of direction, Koyama sees in the influence of the former over the latter an act of self-assertion, based on the idolatrous belief that 'might is right'. The unfortunate thing in Koyama's view is that Japan herself has found it necessary to heed US demands. Obviously, such a move annuls the spirit of the Constitution of 1947. Rearmament is a strong indication that Japan has chosen to revert back to the pre-war position of militarism and imperialism. The 2.1 trillion yen military budget for the Self-Defence-Force for 1979 clearly points in this direction. The revival of state Shintoism is another significant pointer.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{115} ibid. p. 201.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{116} In January 1950, General Douglas MacArthur himself affirmed and emphasized the Japanese right of self-defence. Japan must be 'strengthened' against the threat of China. When the Korean war broke out in June he demanded the Japanese government to establish a National Police Reserve of 75,000 men. This was renamed the Self-Defence Force in 1954 and came to number 140,000 by the late 1970s. ibid., p. 205.}\]
In 1953, with a budget of two billion yen raised voluntarily among the people, the Ise Grand Shinto Shrine was replaced by a new structure according to the tradition which goes back to ancient time. In 1958, the Meiji Shrine—the monument to emperor absolutism—was rebuilt and the emperor and empress worshipped there. Since 1959, the Japanese government has been working towards the nationalization of the Ise Grand Shinto Shrine. The year 1966 saw the return of the Founding Nation Day, (11th of February), the date which had been the symbol for the cult of the emperor worship for seventy years up to 1945. This trend of political events since 1950 suggests that Japan is recreating the spirit of pre-war years. She is returning to the spirit of imperial Japan.

The whole history of Japan provides, for Koyama, a good illustration of what he calls the 'ambiguity' or 'complexity' of history. From the perspective of the biblical faith, history is a story of the confrontation between Yahweh (life, blessing, love) and Baal (death, curse, greed). History always contains these two possibilities. And human beings are continually prompted with the question of choice. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30.19). The question seems quite simple and straightforward. Yet, in the history of humankind, simply to choose 'life and blessing' has not seemed quite that easy.

117 3MHG, p. 103.
In the history of Israel, the words of the prophet Elijah speak to this effect. "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (I Kings 18.21). What is implied in these prophetic words is an indecision which Koyama believes to be characteristic of all human history. "We are engaged in a ritual of limping dance between the two." In the history of Japan, this indecision is quite apparent: from the Baal cult of imperial absolutism and militarism prior to 1945, to the spirit of Yahweh reflected in the postwar Constitution (democracy, peace, harmony, disarmament) and now back to the spirit of pre-war years.

Elijah’s words confront us and tell us to stop this limping dance. His words demand that we must make a choice. To choose Yahweh is to opt for life and blessing. To choose Baal is to choose death and curse. According to Koyama, the choice of post-war Japan to rearm herself, ignoring Article Nine of the 1947 'Peace New Constitution' and thus rekindling the spirit of imperialism and militarism, is a choice for Baal. It is a return to the greed-spirituality of absolutism; the idolatry of greed. And he is deeply concerned with this choice.

Koyama is convinced that it was the spirituality of Baal – increase, greed – that created the evils of imperial Japan. It was this greed for self-gain which made Japan act violently and aggressively towards her own people and neighbouring countries. And it was actually this greed which resulted in

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118 MFMS, p. 215.
her self-destruction. Through her misuse of human freedom, that is, her lust for increased power, Japan brought misery and suffering upon herself. He writes, "Most directly and with least trouble in terms of my understanding, I can accept the Buddha's view, which is that it is greed that destroyed Japan."  

Now after all the horrors and devastation she suffered prior to and during 1945, one would have thought that Japan was unlikely to revive her past. Yet this is certainly not the case. Her modern history demonstrates that she is deeply fascinated with the power of Baal. Koyama finds this unbelievable. "Why is Japan running backwards so fast? ... Only thirty four years from Hiroshima!"

Fascination with the power of Baal is fascination with the power of lust to increase. In Koyama's observation, this appears to underlie Japan's determination to pursue economic strength ever since the war. Bent on achieving economic prosperity, her drive to increase the Gross National Product often made her indifferent to questions of social welfare and justice. Today, Japan is one of the most affluent industrial nations in the world. Her prosperity is unquestionable. This is demonstrated by the staggering sums of money she spends on increasing her Self-Defence Force, (ranked seventh in the world by 1979). It is evident in her efforts to increase her visible religious image by building 3 billion-yen temples.

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119 ibid., p. 229.
120 3MHG, p. 104.
121 ibid., p. 121.
Obviously, Japan has reached the point of 'saturation'\textsuperscript{122} where she privately sits back and enjoys 'the fruit of the ground' (Deut. 26. 5-10). But to be able to do this in the face of a billion famished people is, claims Koyama, a clear indication of the Baal spirituality.\textsuperscript{123}

Convinced that Japan was destroyed by Greed in 1945, Koyama fears that Japan's choice for Baal means that she is constantly faced with the real possibility of destruction yet again. He says, "I do not want to experience 25 May 1945 again. Can't we have good healthy life without returning to militarism?\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{123} NHC, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{124} 3MHG, p. 109.
CHAPTER 10: KOYAMA AND INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY.

Having examined the content of Koyama's work, we shall now attempt an evaluation of it in connection with our main objective. Our overall concern is with the question of indigenous theology, that is, whether or not Koyama's theological program can be regarded as an attempt to indigenize theology. In what ways can or cannot Koyama be said to be doing indigenous theology? What criteria can we employ to make such judgement?

A. Koyama in the light of Taber's Criteria for Indigenous Theology.

There are a number of characteristic features of Koyama's theological work which are I believe, in the light of our examination of the concept in chapter 3, contributive to the formation of an indigenous theology. By way of juxtaposition, these characteristics can be seen to correspond well with what Charles Taber considers to be important criteria for an indigenous christian theology.¹ It is our belief that Charles Taber has gathered together what many others have said about

¹ There are seven criteria for indigenous theology which Charles R. Taber proposes. Four of these are methodological {M} and three are substantive {S}. They are: (1) Biblical {M}; (2) Transcendent {S}; (3) Christological {S}; (4) Prophetic {M}; (5) Dialogical {M}; (6) Open-ended {M}; (7) Subject to the Holy Spirit {S}. These are not to be taken as an exhaustive list of possible criteria. Taber mentions these seven criteria with the realization that some will be controversial and that others which he does not mention may be crucial to other people. Charles R. Taber, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology", Missiology: An International Review, Vol. VI, no. 1 (January, 1978), pp. 53-79.
indigenous theology. For this reason we have considered it appropriate to use his seven criteria as a methodological framework for evaluating Koyama's work.


According to Taber, the central methodological criterion for indigenous theology is that it must be biblically-based. Generally, this criterion has been widely accepted as being valid for any theology which claims to be christian. "Unless our thinking is rooted and grounded in and informed by the Bible, which is or contains our norm, then we are as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal." Why should this be? It is because we as christian believers recognize in the canonical books the authentic unfolding of the revelation given to us in Jesus Christ. For this reason the Bible must serve as "the measuring-rod" by which any indigenization of the gospel message ought to be authenticated.

Now the first thing that must be said about Koyama is that his theology is strongly and conspicuously biblical. Anybody familiar with his writings cannot fail to notice that his theology, to use Dr. Beeby's definition of 'indigenous theology' is "by the bible out of the present." There is hardly a chapter in the whole range of Koyama's literary works

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4 Beeby, ibid., p. 35
where one would not find biblical motifs and concepts being woven into the fabric of the theme under discussion, or biblical symbols and imagery being employed to enlighten and illuminate a theological point.

One cannot help but marvel at the remarkably exciting way he brings biblical insights to bear on his interpretation of history and human experience. David Ford has rightly observed that "a lively engagement with the Bible runs through all of Koyama's theology."5 Such an engagement is not at the level of arguing for a particular status for Scripture or a doctrine of revelation or inspiration. Rather it uses Scripture in a variety of ways, often offering new imaginative insights or making surprising and illuminating links with modern situations. Koyama's theology as a whole is "self-consciously Asian."6 But whilst this is so and although his commitment is dedicated to reflecting on the history and contemporary situations of Asia, his theological reflection is never divorced from the truth of the Bible. Koyama's theology is anchored firmly in the Bible. He does not give the Asian context a normative function. Rather the Bible is used to illuminate and determine the meaning of the context. In a review of Waterbuffalo Theology, Hollenweger comments that Koyama, though sympathetic at heart with the Asian human context as he usually is in his interpretation of it, "remains on each page a Bible-oriented theologian." And to this single


factor Hollenweger attributes "the fascination of the book.""

That the Bible serves as the norm for Koyama's theological enterprise is indicated by Koyama himself in his contribution to a book designed to bring 'minjung theology' into dialogue with the ecumenical theological community. Responding from an Asian perspective to this new theology, Koyama voices a critical concern regarding the question of minjung theology and its 'source of authority.' He senses a grave danger to the development of this theology in the apparent tendency of minjung theologians to make the minjung experience (oppression, exploitation, alienation and suffering) the absolute norm of theology. They tend to subordinate scriptural authority and to use Scripture to support minjung experience as the norm of theological work. Critical of this type of approach, Koyama asks,


9 Most of the contributors to this volume are aware of this tendency of minjung theologians and share Koyama's concern. c.f. Jung Young Lee, "Minjung Theology: A Critical Introduction," p. 21; Letty M. Russell, "Minjung Theology in Women's Perspective." p. 81.
Why is it that in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, so fascinating and creative, the use of the Bible is surprisingly meagre? How is it that both Hyun Young-hak and Suh Nam-dong (and other contributors to Minjung Theology) can narrate their theological interpretation of the people's cultural experience without bringing the words from the Bible to intersect the experience? I am not suggesting the desirability of a proof-text use of the Bible. But do the minjung theologians have a new approach to the use of the Bible in its relationship to understanding culture which the Christian oikumene outside Korea has not yet shared?

The implication of Koyama's question suggests a need for minjung theologians to engage more seriously with the Bible. It suggests the necessity of relating the culture of the minjung to the Bible if minjung theology is to gain credibility in the eyes of the Christian world. Koyama also implies that failure to do this is indicative of a flaw in the minjung theological methodology. Hence addressing such questions as the ones he has asked is a 'crucial' task 'for further growth of minjung theology.'

Koyama obviously believes that the Bible is indispensable in any understanding of human culture's relationship to divine revelation, and of the relationship between culture and social liberation. "The greatness of the Bible", he writes, "is that it can intertwine two dynamisms, revelation and culture,

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10 A publication by the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia. The book serves as an introduction of 'minjung theology' to the Christian readers outside Asia. It is a collection of articles by numerous Korean minjung theologians.

11 Two of the leading figures in this theological movement.

12 Kosuke Koyama, ibid., p. 151.

13 ibid., p. 152.
without destroying the contents of the revelation."\footnote{14} It is certainly not in accord with christian tradition to take the Korean cultural experience of the minjung (people) and absolutize it as if it is the only source of truth about God. The Bible is the primary source for theological reflection. It illuminates culture and helps us to interpret culture theologically.

2. Transcendence.

One of the major thrusts of the Bible itself, one which is so central that it cannot be simply attributed to a cultural quirk of ancient Israel and its historic descendants in the Church is the belief that God is transcendent. Taber takes this biblical affirmation as an indispensable substantive criterion for indigenous theology.

By whatever means, Christian theology must affirm that humanity and God, though intimately related through the 'image of God' in humanity, are not the same; the one is creature and finite, the other Creator and infinite. It is quite necessary, by virtue of the Incarnation, to affirm also the immanence of God, however, "a theology that lacks the dimension of transcendence, however it may be expressed, cannot," claims Taber, "qualify as a christian theology."\footnote{15}

Reflecting on Koyama's theology, there seems little need to press the fact that he does make this affirmation quite

\footnote{14} ibid., p. 151.

\footnote{15} Charles R. Taber, op. cit., p. 72.
plainly. In the themes examined in the previous chapters, we have seen that he is very emphatic about this aspect of the biblical faith. In relation to the theme of history, Koyama strongly maintains that God and humanity are not identical. Though they are intimately related, this intimate relationship does not in any way warrant any identification of the two. Although God is personally involved in the history of humankind, the latter can never be totally identified with God.

For one thing, the God of the bible is Creator, Lord and Ruler of all created things. God transcends all; God is beyond creation, beyond nature, beyond history, beyond humanity.\(^{16}\) As creator and Lord of all, God is the One who "shakes the wilderness of Kadesh"; the One who "sits enthroned over the flood."\(^{17}\) In other words, God is not bound by anything. God remains above and beyond history and nature.

For another thing, God is holy. According to the Bible, God's holiness is defined in terms of 'separation,' 'consecration,' 'sacred.'\(^{18}\) In the light of Exodus 3: 5 - "put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground," - Koyama finds in the biblical idea of divine holiness an inherent sense of 'taboo' or 'tapu'; a sense of the inapproachability of God.\(^{19}\) In other

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\(^{16}\) WBT, p. 34f.

\(^{17}\) Refer, Psalm 29: 3-11.

\(^{18}\) See, Exodus 3: 5; 31: 15; Lev. 10: 10.

words, God is "set apart" from the ordinary. This set-apartness designates God's transcendence.

From the perspective of the Cross, the God revealed in the Bible, to use Luther's words, is a 'hidden God' (deus absconditus) hidden in contradiction. While God's immanence comes to concrete and ultimate manifestation in the Cross of Jesus, God remains at the same time, transcendent. This means that the holy God can never be grasped fully by us directly. God's holiness means that human beings cannot comprehensively fathom the depth of God's mystery; that there is always a 'plus,' a 'something more' about God which resists formulation or definition.

That God can both be transcendent and immanent at the same time is the paradox of the mystery of God, the 'stumbling block' for the Jews and 'foolishness' to the Greeks. God's transcendence is rooted in the fact that God is 'holy.' Divine holiness therefore precludes any identity between God and human beings.

As we saw in the previous chapters, this is main thrust of Koyama's critique of idolatry. As soon as a nation, a community, an individual or any kind of system (political, economic, cultural, religious, theological) becomes identified with God, then idolatry is committed. The inevitable result of idolatry is violence, human suffering and destruction.


20 MFMS, p. 259.

21 3MHG, p. 23.
The history of imperial Japan has provided a characteristic example. The idolatry of emperor worship has served as the primary focus of Koyama's critique. And by setting his reflection on the Christian God in the context of the peculiarly Japanese idea of a human emperor who is also God is no doubt an attempt to indigenize theology.

The idolatry of emperor worship is certainly not the only target of Koyama's criticisms. By reflecting on the idolatry of his own country, he at the same time brings into clear relief other forms of idolatry in the past and present history of humankind. Because idolatry is a universal problem, Koyama's theology has global implications.

This universal dimension is brought to a focus in his criticism of human greed and modern attitudes towards technology which come to manifestation in global militarism, nuclearism, racism, and other 'isms.' The tendency of modern civilization to identify science-based technology with the source of salvation (the Holy) is indicative of an idolatrous temperament which sees no qualitative difference between God and humanity. It suggests a modern disposition towards equating the infinite and unconditional (God) with the finite and conditional (human).

In view of Koyama's 'particular orbit theology,' it is clear that Koyama's critique of idolatry is directed primarily at his own country. The implicit suggestion is that the tendency toward idolizing technology through the power of greed is something real in the world of Japan. It becomes an
issue of real theological import given the fact that Japan is one of the world leaders in modern technology.

Now in focusing on issues which are at the heart of Japanese culture and history in interpreting the truth of the biblical God, Koyama is trying to bring the God of Jesus closer to the experience of his own people. By expressing his faith response to the love of God revealed in the crucified Jesus in relation to those problems which are particular to his own context, he seeks to bring the Christian God to address the hearts of his people in their own place and time.

For Koyama, one of the tasks of Christian theology is to criticize and try to unveil, through the Word of Cross, all forms of idolatry. Theology must unearth and identify those who engage, consciously or unconsciously in idolatry, as well as the human structures which perpetuate it. All this goes to suggest that in Koyama's theology, there is a conscious effort to maintain that fundamental difference between God and the world. God is perfect, humanity is not. That this is a basic trait of Koyama's thought shows that his theology is in continuity with Christian tradition.

3. Christological.

A third prerequisite for Christian theology and the second substantive one according to Taber is that it be 'christological.'

This is rather stating the obvious. Taber himself realizes that. Nevertheless, in virtue of the scandal of the particularity of the Incarnation, it is necessary to emphasize
which we discussed in Chapter 5, it seems hardly necessary to say any more about the Christocentricity of Koyama's theology. It has become quite obvious that Koyama's thinking is christological through and through. Though it seems that we are about to 'paddle the same ocean twice,' to use a Samoan metaphor, the nature of our task seems to demand further comment.

Firstly, the christological emphasis of Koyama's thought is evident in his examination of how Christ stands in 'German mysticism,' as represented by Meister Eckhart (1327) and John Tauler (1361). In Koyama's observation, there are three inter-related thoughts which accentuate the un-Christocentric nature of German mysticism: (a) the idea of the soul becoming God, (which means, Christologically, that God is no longer holy); (b) the idea of God becoming "God-ness" (which means, Christologically, that there is no longer a stumbling block in God); and (c) the idea of journeying to God, (which means, Christologically, that God is no longer hidden).

According to Koyama, these three motifs of 'continuity,' 'God-ness' and 'un-hidden God' show the hostile reactions of the German mystics to biblical proclamation of the Christocentric Gospel. What is clear is that they are eliminating the respective 'essential marks of the christian affirmation that Jesus Christ, the same Jesus who lived in Palestine 1900 years ago and who was raised to life and ascended to the right hand of the Father is 'today' Lord, and that in the eschaton he will bring in his kingdom. Charles R. Taber, op. cit., p. 72.

Kosuke Koyama, "Strengthen the Discernment of the 'Christocentric'" (German Mysticism in Thailand), SEAJT, Vol. 4, no. 2 (October 1962), pp. 52-60.
Christocentricity,' that is, the holiness of God, the inevitability of a stumbling block in God and the hiddenness of God. The conclusion Koyama draws from this examination is that German mysticism is not 'Christ-centred but soul-centred.' It is not Christ who is seen as the Mediator but the pure rationality of the spark is the source of human justification and salvation.

Secondly, Koyama sees the appropriate 'personality' of theology in Asia centring on the message of the crucified Christ. Jesus Christ, the mediator of divine redemption for the world, is the centre of the Christian faith. He is "God's good news itself." In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is unequivocally seen to be rejected by God. New Testament interpretations speak of Jesus as 'being thrown out,' 'being pushed out,' 'being edged out' (Matt. 20. 28; Mark 10. 45; 1 Tim. 2. 6) for the sake of many. But the amazing thing, says Koyama, is that "this arrangement belongs to the very heart of God's salvation history." In other words, it is precisely this way that God plans and wills the redemption of the whole world. By letting Godself be pushed to the periphery, God in Christ brings the world to reconciliation with Godself.

24 ibid., pp. 53-58.
25 ibid., p. 57.
26 David Ford, op. cit., p. 229.
27 WBT, p. 174.
28 ibid., p. 175.
The cross is the supreme and ultimate culmination of this activity of God in Jesus. The cross summarizes the mission of Jesus Christ. He says,

The cross is the moment of God’s supreme agape revelation. The resurrection is the confirmation of God given to the reality of agape that 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us' (Eph. 5.1). Koyama sees the suffering love of God manifested on the cross as the ground for the apostolic mission of reconciliation. What this apostolic mission entails is understood in terms of self-denial and servanthood, ('ebed yahweh'). It is, as the apostle Paul has demonstrated in his life and work, a life of 'the most abject of mankind,' 'condemned man,' disgraced man,' 'the scum of the earth,' 'the dregs of humanity' and 'the cast out' (1 Cor. 1.18; 2.4-4). Hence the mission of the church must seek, as Paul did, to express and communicate the life of Jesus, that is, the life of servanthood.

Similarly, theology must speak about the One who is absolutely rejected and thrown out. It must emphasize the story of Jesus Christ who, in 'search of humanity' and in faithful obedience to the Father denied himself completely to the extent of being pushed 'outside the gate' to die on the cross. Theology in Asia must therefore assume, as it were, her own personality based on the crucified Christ. Theology must be engaged not only in the mind but in the heart as well. It must bear the 'marks of Jesus' in the depth of "Asian hearts

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29 ibid., p. 180.
30 ibid., p. 181.
and kidneys." Only when the theology of the cross is rooted in our Asian souls may we be able to "bring forth a living, dynamic and free personality of theology in Asia."

4. Prophetic.

A fourth criterion for indigenous theology proposed by Taber is that it must be prophetic. He writes,

A true indigenous theology must not only affirm the positive values of the culture in which it is being done, but it must also challenge those aspects which express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil.

In our examination of Koyama's theology, we have found that this is exactly what he does. On one hand, he affirms the rich cultural heritage that belongs to him as a Japanese Asian person. On the other, he keeps a critical eye on those aspects of Asian cultures in which the demonic forces are discerned to be at work.

For Koyama, to be Christian is to be human. One certainly cannot be a Christian without being firstly human.

If I am human I react as a human. If I am not human how can I be a Christian? Isn't this point quite clear as we study the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Job, Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and so on in the Old Testament and also the New Testament apostles?

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31 ibid., p. 183.
32 ibid., p. 185.
33 Charles R. Taber, op. cit., p. 73.
34 50M, p. 50.
The implication of this statement is that Christianity embraces a person with his/her total humanity intact. Furthermore, to be christian means to be a particular human being: European, Chinese, African, Maori, Asian, etc. Becoming Christian does not necessitate the forfeiture of one's cultural identity.

Like all human cultures, Asian cultures contain a lot of positive values which can contribute to the life of humankind. Koyama wants to affirm these positive cultural values. In the 'polytheistic cosmological,' 'cyclical' and 'relaxed culture' of his own Japan, he writes,

> there are elements which are too rich and precious to be lightly discarded, and which can make very significant and positive contributions to the Christian faith, such as loyalty, filial piety to lord and community, and self-negation.\(^{35}\)

As we have seen in our discussion of the themes of 'Christianity and Buddhism' as well as 'Human Greed,' Koyama is very appreciative of Asian cultures and religions. He greatly values the Buddhist practice of 'mercy' and 'self-denial.' He sees these as characteristics of the Buddhist way of life which can be of tremendous help in the expression of the Gospel. Since they are in fact recognized human values, they need to be constantly upheld and affirmed.

Koyama considers a negative element in popular Asian christian piety, to be the belief that when one becomes a christian, one must automatically cut loose all ties with one's culture. He is strongly against this notion. He protests that Asian Christians tend to ignore their own cultural

\(^{35}\) MFMS, pp. 6-7.
heritage: arts, literature, painting, poetry, religious and historical experiences. Too frequently, for many Asians, "the moment of baptism becomes the moment of 'becoming a stranger' to one's own cultural and religious values." But there is no need for this. One's language, culture and psychology can all be brought to Jesus Christ.

Underlying this false belief is the assumption that non-Christian cultures are inferior, false and pagan. Under the influence of that assumption, all that is positive in Asian cultures becomes negated. Even the simple admiration of the Buddha, for example, is seen as a sign of disloyalty to Jesus. According to Koyama, such an attitude is due not so much to one's faith in Jesus as to one's acceptance of the Western way of life as the Christian way. And this is a grave misunderstanding. Such thinking treats Jesus in a way analogous to the cheap commercial battle on television where the quality of one washing powder is maintained by advertising the defects of other brands.

Whilst Koyama's theology seeks to affirm positive values in Asian cultures, it also challenges those aspects of culture which manifests an alignment with the forces of evil. It will be too much of a repetition if we said any more about Koyama's criticism of idolatry and greed in world history and particularly in Japan's past and present history. Suffice it to say that Koyama's theology stands in the Asian theological tradition of contextualizing the gospel. In this movement, theology is understood to consist of 'critical

36 50M, p. 83.
accommodational-prophetism and critical prophetic accommodation.' The purpose of such a theology is to 'challenge' and 'change' the situation of Asia. In this respect, Koyama's theology qualifies to be called prophetic.

5. Dialogical.

In chapter 5, we pointed out that Koyama's theology is dialogical and practical. I want to make a few comments only on the 'dialogical' nature of Koyama's theology. The reason for this is simply that in Taber's scheme, another criterion for an indigenous theology is that it ought to be produced in dialogue,

dialogue within the community of believers, ... dialogue with the world in which it is being evolved - the culture, the religion, the politics, the economics, the social system - ... and dialogue with the church in the broadest sense.'

First of all, we have pointed out that Koyama's theological program basically is an attempt to re-root the gospel in the histories of Asia. To re-root the christian message in the context of Asia is to indigenize it. But any attempt to indigenize the gospel involves a search for a way of interpreting, expressing and proclaiming the gospel in the given context. Now common sense tells us that an act of interpretation, expression, or proclamation presupposes a second party. For one can only interpret something, express a thought, or proclaim a message to someone else. This is the logical structure of a dialogue. A person trying to interpret

37 Charles R. Taber, op. cit., p. 75.
or express or proclaim something to him/herself engages in a monologue. At this theoretical level, it can be argued that Koyama's theology is 'produced in dialogue.' For, what Koyama is saying in his theological writings is certainly not directed to himself, but mainly to Asian Christians, Asian community, as well as the whole Christian oikoumene. This is basically what dialogue is, a conversation between two or more parties.

Secondly, and on a more practical level, in the attempt to indigenize the Christian gospel, Koyama is trying to find a way of 'speaking', 'saying' or translating the meaning of the gospel into the language of another, in this case, Asians. One of the ways he does this is by utilizing words or terminology (e.g. Buddhist terms such as anicca,) concepts, (e.g. Asian view of history; heaven and earth, greed), imagery and symbols, which Asians are familiar with in order to convey the meaning of the Gospel. Another way Koyama does his theology is by addressing himself to real and live issues arising out of Asian situations. Issues such as human greed, idolatry, the relation between Christianity and other religions, suffering, rich and poor, are of great concern for Asian people. By raising these issues, Koyama is in fact engaging in dialogue with members of his own Asian community. But since many of these issues are also global in scope, his theology has also the dynamic of provoking dialogue with the world community.

Thirdly, the dialogical nature of Koyama's theology may be glimpsed from the agenda he offers for an Asian theology.
Summed up under four headings, the third part of the agenda reads,

There is the urgent need to work out better forms of relationship between East and West, North and South. Christian universality must be made concretely meaningful to all humanity. The resources of each area and tradition need to be opened up to others — for example, how might Martin Luther King's 'Letter from the Birmingham City Jail, 1963' contribute to theology in Asia.38

Obviously what is called for here is a theological dialogue between the various members of the world Christian community. There is a need for Asian theologians to engage in dialogue with European and North Atlantic communities. By exchanging the experience of faith from various contexts, the meaning of Christianity as a universal faith may be realized more concretely.

Under the fourth heading of the agenda, Koyama writes,

How do we find the meaning for Christians of the great religious traditions of today's Asia, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and other religions of China and Japan? They like Christians, are undergoing transformation, and the quality of their mutual understanding and interaction will be of vast importance not only to the future of Asia but to the future of all the religions of the world.39

In this, we can see that Koyama's need for dialogue is not confined to the Christian community. Implicit in the statement is a need to extend the dialogical process to members of other faiths as well. As we have mentioned elsewhere, Koyama is very keen to have better relations with the majority of Asians who are adherents of other faiths. Often he admonishes Asian

38 David Ford, op. cit., p. 231.
39 ibid., p. 231.
Christians not to close their minds to people of other faiths but to be appreciative of them and the beauties he believes to be contained in their religions. He feels it impossible for Christians to define where the followers of other religions stand in relation to Jesus Christ, though he is sure that Christ loves them all.

In summary, what we have tried to show is that Koyama's theology is dialogical. It is produced in dialogue with Asians, Christians and non-christians. In view of his own theological program of re-rooting the gospel, the whole focus of such a program cannot be other than to create a dialogue between gospel and its Asian audience. Koyama himself has pointed out that the gospel must engage 'in dialogue with some native words' when it expresses itself to the native world. And such a dialogue carried out with the intention of achieving "right reception and rooting of the gospel in a given locality is the focus of the indigenization of theology."43

6. Open-ended.

'Open-endedness,' or flexibility is another criterion which Taber proposes for an indigenous theology. Two reasons call for this necessity of theology to be open-ended. One, there is the fact that society and culture evolve. As they do,

issues change their complexion; some disappear, new ones emerge, and the total configuration, at least in its details, is perpetually in the process of transformation. Now to work within such a situation of flux, theology must be itself extremely flexible.

Second, it is necessary for us as Christians to be modest about our grasp of biblical truth at any stage of our pilgrimage. Taber is aware that the closing of the canon is often confused with the closing of the theologizing activity of the church. Such confusion usually ends up in 'idolizing' our own particular theology. What is meant here is that it is folly for any segment of the church to conclude that it has completed its theological task. Theology is never finished. Continually, it must "forever be reformed so that it may forever be approaching Truth by successive approximations."

In the light of Taber's explanation, it should be clear that Koyama's theology is definitely open-ended for a number of reasons. The first derives from the perspective of Koyama's theological goal. Certainly, Koyama's theology is far from being an effort to express the content of the faith in some systematic form as one might expect. It is never his intention to try and systematize the components of the christian faith in such a way as to create a theological system in the manner of giants like Barth, Tillich, Rahner. Koyama is not concerned to develop lengthy analyses or arguments about, God, Christ, sin, salvation, humanity and so on.

41 Charles R. Taber, op. cit., p. 75.
42 ibid., p. 76.
What he is basically concerned with is a way of being Christian that accepts the task of reflecting upon the Asian experiences and the questions that arise from it. This is why he begins by raising issues and trying to provoke a dialogue between them and the Bible. David Ford has rightly observed that there is in Koyama’s theology,
a constant questioning, ethical, and imaginative engagement with particular issues and situation and the attempt to open them up to a better understanding and future.43

Such an attempt as this certainly cannot lead to anything other than an open-ended theology. And in the nature of such a task, it is not surprising to find only a "few confident overviews" in Koyama’s theology.44

The openness of Koyama’s theology is shown in the way he subverts or explodes positions that seem to him too neatly systematic and coherent.45 For example, one of the criticisms Koyama makes, often within the context of mission, relates to the relatively established Christian position with regard to the question of other religions. For too long Christians have maintained a 'centre' complex, the mentality which entertains the thought of Christianity as the only true religion, and having monopoly on the truth of God. With that mentality, Christians have looked with contempt upon people of other faiths, refusing to appreciate even acts of mercy and love performed by them. This mentality has not only been reflected

43 David Ford, op. cit., p. 226.
44 ibid., p. 226.
45 ibid., p. 226.
in attitudes, it has also been reflected in the theology of the church.

Up to the second half of this century, Christian theology has largely been a 'theologia gloriae.' In this theology, emphasis has been on God's justice, power, perfection, glory. Likewise Christianity has been seen as the sole guardian of divine truth, possessing all knowledge and having the final say in human destiny. Since Christianity is 'superior' and 'unique'; "the best religion Christianity" and "finality Christianity," all other religions are regarded as either false or perverted. According to Koyama, the negative attitudes of Christians towards adherents of other religions, based on a theology of glory betrays an arrogant, superficial, unreligious and immature understanding of Christianity."

To think that Christianity possesses comprehensive knowledge of God is to imply that God is fully comprehensible and therefore an 'obvious God,' without the 'stumbling block' and no longer 'mysterious.'" Such a theology is not only too restrictive and passive, it does not do justice to the Gospel message of God's love in Jesus Christ.

The theology of the cross mediates and speaks about the broken Christ who embraces the broken world. A theology inspired not by glory and power, but by 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the 'weakness of God is stronger than men.' Koyama claims that it is this kind of theology which is able to meet the claims that other faiths make. The

"NHC, p. 88.

"ibid., p. 71."
Christ who affirms his centrality by going to the periphery is the Christ who can establish a healing tie with the other faiths."

From the perspective of theology of the cross, we cannot say that we have the last word about the world and our destiny. Nor can we say that we possess the complete truth about God; that is God's alone. If we speak the last word about ourselves and the world, making a complete circle without a break, as it were, we become imperial tyrants. Theology of the cross lives on the basis of a broken circle as it reflects the broken Christ. That is, the Christian faith lives on the belief that human salvation is bought at the cost of Jesus' broken body. The restoration of human wholeness becomes possible only through God's action in the crucified and broken Christ.

In accordance with that central Christian truth, Christian theology can never claim to be complete. Neither can it claim to be absolute. Every theology is only a partial approximation of the truth about God. By virtue of that, Christian theologians must be prepared to recognize that their theology, however profound and coherent, does not embody the whole truth of God. It is in this respect that Koyama speaks of 'brokenness' as the "essential stigmata of theology." Christian theology must display a recognition of this partial and broken nature of all reasoned talk about God. For him, it is through this brokenness that Christian theology can exert

" MFMS, p. 256.
" ibid., p. 258
its influence upon history. Koyama's theology therefore, being a theologia crucis, is not a closed theology but an open-ended one.


The final criterion which Taber sets for theology is that it ought to be subject to the Holy Spirit. The explicit role of the Holy Spirit in Koyama's theology is relatively small compared to the first and second persons of the trinity. This might warrant some criticism from some quarters. However, it must be pointed out that the scanty treatment of this theme does not mean total omission. Nor does it mean that the Holy Spirit is an unimportant or unnecessary component of Koyama's theology.

The fact is, Koyama does give due attention to the Holy Spirit in his writings. Although it is not treated significantly on its own, it is there nevertheless. It is inherent in his treatment of other themes. The fact that

50 Charles R. Taber, op. cit., p. 76.

51 In dealing with the theme of technology, Koyama warns against what he calls the "sin of speed and efficiency" which has had a drastic effect on the work of Christian ministers in Thailand. The tendency to go "too fast" in one's ministry has often led to a failure to "pour oil on the wounds" (Luke 10. 33-4) of those suffering from "brokenness." Also, in adopting an "efficient" mindedness, one often tends to fail to wait for the Paraclete upon whose counsel, comfort and strength alone the accomplishment of Christian mission depends. Kosuke Koyama, "Eating with Human Brokenness, We Meet God the Paraclete," SEAJT, Vol. 5 (July 1964), pp. 54-55. See also, "The Mad Man Sits Down," SEAJT, Vol. 14, no. 2 (1973), pp. 3-12; "Barefoot in an Ascending Elevator: A Meditation," (Culture and Religion at the Meeting Point Between the Curve-Mind and the Straight-Mind), in On Language Culture and
Koyama's theology is directed primarily to the Asian community, or that the Asian Church is constantly in the picture means that Koyama's theology inadvertently speaks of the sphere of the Holy Spirit.

B. Re-rooting the Gospel in Asian Soil.

In addition to these criteria, there are other aspects of Koyama's theology which, in the light of our proposals for an indigenous theology (see Chapter 3), can be seen to be indicative of an attempt to do theology indigenously.

Firstly, it must be noted that in expressing and reflecting upon the content of the faith, Koyama uses symbols and imagery with which Asians themselves are familiar. To use a couple of examples, the image of a hard-working, slow-moving waterbuffalo—a common everyday sight in Thailand—is used to illuminate the meaning of God's love for humanity. The three-mile-an-hour walking speed gives expression to the God who 'slows' down voluntarily even to the point of death on the cross because of love for human beings.

experience itself. No doubt Asian people can identify and understand what it means to be "broken" since "human brokenness" (suffering, poverty, alienation, oppression) is what characterizes their actual life situation. This familiar image therefore serves to illuminate the Christian truth about the suffering love of God. God's love manifested in the broken Christ embraces sinful humanity and therefore has power to heal all sorts of broken human relationships.

Secondly, Koyama uses ideas and concepts at the core of Asian religions and philosophies to express Christian teachings. Buddhist concepts such as dukkha, anatta, anicca, tanha are a few of them. While Buddhists see the reality of human existence in terms of meaningless suffering (dukkha), Koyama gives dukkha a new meaning by emphasizing the suffering love of God which enables human beings to find meaning in life.

Against the Buddhist view of salvation which necessitates the removal of craving (tanha) or self-annihilation (anatta) Koyama speaks of salvation found in the love of the God whose sphere of redemptive activity is history. Since God has come to history in Christ Jesus, history is no longer just a mass of suffering but the place where human beings can gain new life through the power of God's love. History is meaningless only when human beings are grasped by the power of greed. Therefore it is not the self that human beings ought to destroy in order to attain salvation (nirvana) but the power of greed which breeds violence, suffering and destruction.
The idea of self-denial which Koyama emphasizes is closely connected with these ideas. Buddhists in general understand self-denial in terms of extinction of the self and complete indifference to the world. Using that same concept, Koyama points to self-denial as the concrete expression of God's love for humanity. The self-denial of Jesus on the cross shows the depth of his love for God and neighbours. It sums up Jesus' mission of reconciliation. Self-denial must therefore constitute Christian living in relation to people of other faiths.

In relation to Buddhist beliefs, self-denial must mean neither the extinction of the self nor an escape from history. Rather it must mean the extinction of historical greed and involvement in the fight against all evil powers which destroy human well-being.

Greed is a central concept in Buddhist philosophy. Koyama uses this idea to illuminate the biblical idea of idolatry. Greed in Buddhist belief is the source of suffering which binds humanity to this existence. In Koyama's biblical interpretation, greed is more or less identical with self-righteousness which is the source of idolatry. Idolatry is a sin which leads to human suffering and destruction. In view of the Buddhist understanding of history as a mass of suffering, Koyama sometimes refers to history as the history of human greed.
C. Summary.

In this chapter, we have shown that there is in Koyama's theology an exact correspondence to all seven criteria proposed by Charles Taber. In terms of methodology, Koyama's theology is biblically-based, prophetic, dialogical and open-ended. In terms of substance, it is christological and affirms the transcendence of God. Since Koyama satisfactorily meets all of the criteria for an indigenous theology, the conclusion seems quite obvious. That is, his theology can certainly be regarded as being indigenous theology. This conclusion is further endorsed by the fact that Koyama makes a conscious effort to use indigenous ideas, concepts, symbols and images to express the content of the Christian faith in order for Asians to understand.
CHAPTER 11: CHOAN SENG SONG.

A. His Life and Work.

Choan-seng Song was born on October 19, 1929, in Tainan, Taiwan. At the age of thirty-three, he married Mei-Man Chen, a pianist. The Songs have two daughters, Ju-Ping and Ju-Ying. Poems and line drawings by the two girls feature in some of Song’s writings. The fact that Song includes a contribution from his family in his work is a good demonstration, at least in my own observation, of one of Song’s convictions concerning the unlimited scope of theology. That is to say, theology has to grapple with the whole of life, with the world, with creation. Thus even a simple poem is a worthy resource for theological reflection on the message of the Gospel.

Song was educated both at home and abroad. In 1954, he graduated from Taiwan National University with a B.A. in Philosophy. He then went overseas and studied at New College, University of Edinburgh where he graduated with a B.D. in 1958. He also attended the University of Basel and later Union

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1 Mei-Man Chen’s music appears to have been not only a source of inspiration but also a significant influence in Song’s writing. As we shall later see, the fact that Song uses a musical terminology, (i.e. "transposition"), to describe his theological method is a fair indication that our observation is not unfounded.

2 In Tell Us Our Names (1984), each of the essays is accompanied by drawings made by the daughters to depict the folk story being used in the essays. Theology From the Womb of Asia (1986) opens with a poem by Ju-Ping in the Preface. Entitled ’The Poet,’ the poem serves to sum up in a concise way what Song is claiming to be an appropriate and valid way of doing theology in Asia.
Theological Seminary in New York where he received his Ph.D. in 1965. As is often to be expected of Asians whose theological education is done mostly in Western institutions, Song's thinking was greatly influenced by a number of Western thinkers among whom were Barth, Brunner, Tillich and Bonhoeffer.

Song's impressive career began in 1960 when he became an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. During the same year, he joined the staff of Tainan Theological College as lecturer in Old Testament until 1962. Three years later, he was appointed professor of systematic theology and principal of the College. He held that position for five years (1965 - 1970) during which time he is said to have been active in the political scene. Dr. S. Batumalai relates that it was Song's engagement with political matters in Taiwan that occasioned his reluctant departure from his own homeland. "Political realities forced him (Song) to leave Taiwan," writes Batumalai.3

Song immediately joined the General Programme Council of the Reformed Church in America, New York, where for the next three years (1970-1973), he worked as secretary for Asian Ministries. From 1973 to 1982, he served on the staff of the World Council of Churches as associate director of the Secretariat of the Faith and Order Commission. In 1982, he was professor of theology at the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST) which has its headquarters in Manilla,

Philippines. In 1983, he coordinated the study "Called to Witness to the Gospel Today," for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Geneva, Switzerland. In 1984, he became regional professor of SEAGST. Since 1985, Song has been Professor of Theology and Asian Cultures at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.¹

Song has been a past member of the executive committees of both the North East Asia and South East Asia Association of Theological Schools. Since 1983, a series of annual theological seminar-workshops was carried out by the SEAGST in co-operation with Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre in Hong Kong and Kansai Seminar House, Kyoto Japan. As professor of theology of SEAGST, Song was very much in the forefront of this theological venture. Both in terms of leadership as well as scholarship, his service has been invaluable in these theological seminar-workshops. Presently, he is Dean of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA).²

¹ Since the 1970s, Song has been a visiting lecturer at a number of Theological institutions and seminaries in Asia, North America, Canada, and Australasia. As a point of interest, Song was a member of the archaeological team that excavated El Jib (the Biblical Gibeon) in 1959. See, Hal May (ed.) Contemporary Authors, Vol. 115, (Mich: Gale Research Company, 1985), p. 426.

² Inaugurated in 1987, this new theological programme was further to develop Asian theologies by building upon the groundwork already laid by the theological seminar-workshops mentioned above. For details see, C. S. Song, "Freedom of Christian Theology For Asian Cultures" - Celebrating the Inauguration of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, PTCA Bulletin, Vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1988), pp. 5-10.
B. His Writings.

A prolific writer, Song has since the early sixties regularly contributed articles to both Northeast and Southeast Asian journals of theology. He has edited a number of writings among which are (with Gayraud Wilmore) *Asians and Blacks: Theological Challenges* (EACC, 1972) and *Doing Theology Today* (Madras: CLS, 1976). He is the author of several books both in Chinese and English. Of his major works in English, the following have gained wide readership: *Christian Mission in Reconstruction* (1975), *Third Eye Theology* (1979), *The Tears of Lady Meng* (1981), *The Compassionate God* (1982), *Tell Us Our Names* (1984), *Theology From the Womb of Asia* (1985), *Jesus the Crucified People* (1990), *The Stranger on the Shore* (1992). These books are the primary sources for our examination of Song's theology.

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7 Song's books written in Chinese include *Prelude to a New Era* (1962) and *The Church - Its Task and Responsibility* (1980).

8 I wish to mention two things here. First I could not get hold of the last two books listed until the middle of 1992. By that time the draft of this thesis was literally done. For this reason, these two books are not referred to as much as the others. Secondly, I am aware of Song's latest book, *Jesus and the Reign of God* (Fortress, 1993), in fact I possess a copy of it, but its late arrival precludes it from inclusion in the above list of sources for this study.
One can hardly fail to observe that, by his selection of biblical motifs and themes for development, Song concentrates on those theological issues he believes are of paramount importance for the church in Asia today. One such theme is the nature and role of Christian mission. Aspects of his thought partially developed through earlier articles are brought together under the aegis of his *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis*.

Here Song propounds the view that Christ gave his life as a ransom for many. Christ's mission is at the core of Christian mission which should not be solely to convert pagans to Christianity for geographical extension and numerical expansion. The essence of Christian mission consists in the manifestation of healing through suffering but this central element is notably lacking in modern Christian missions. Song affirms that the biblical concepts of creation and redemption are basic to the Christian mission. This affirmation is the main theme which runs through the entire book. God, as creator and redeemer transcends boundaries of race, culture and even religion and cannot be nationalized or encapsulated into a single tradition.

Incarnation provides the theological framework by which Song understands Christian mission. The incarnation speaks of 'enfleshment' and 'self-emptying' and so points to the rejection of the old "compound approach" which spoke of the human desire for security. He follows Bonhoeffer in stressing that the Church is to live for others. Mission is linked with the Eucharist, as both mediate Christ's redemptive presence
to the world.

In *Third Eye Theology* Song further develops some of his earlier themes to formulate a theological prolegomena for Asian Christians: a theology of "suffering unto hope," and "the politics of resurrection." In the first part of the book, Song places the "beginning" and "goal" of theology in the suffering love of God. "God's heart aches when the world is gripped with pain and suffering" (p. 40). This "pain-love" of God is manifested in the Cross. Here theology "ought to find its beginning and its goal" (p. 54). Theology is "a hermeneutics of the love of the God-Man active in human community" (p. 91). The seeking to "reflect on this love and to set this love in motion" in the human community, is denoted as "the authentic doing of theology" (p. 98). For Song, theological reflection ought to begin with the heart, that is, with the love of God in Christ and how this love is to be communicated to others in order that others may find in it liberation and hope.

Part II propounds the theme of "suffering unto hope". Owing to the terrible suffering and misery of Asian peoples caused by devastating wars, such as the Vietnam War, these people are taught "by centuries of tradition and culture to believe that it is their fate to suffer. This is "suffering unto despair" (p. 172). However, God is the power who "transforms suffering into hope." Therefore an important task of the church is to play an active role in the transformation of "suffering unto despair ... into suffering unto hope." (ibid.)
A third theme Song deals with in this book is what he calls the "politics of resurrection." Song says, "the resurrection must be experienced in and through the cross just as the cross must be seen in the light of the resurrection." (p. 180). This can be called "God’s politics of resurrection." (p. 181) This "politics of God" does not only liberate "an oppressed people from oppression and injustice but also liberates the oppressors from the false pretences and acts of violence with which they strengthen their rule" (p. 218). The involvement in politics is "both a right and a duty" of responsible Christian citizens because they are "partners in God’s politics of making all things new." (p. 221).

Song’s thinking on the theme of politics is further found in his The Tears of Lady Meng. Here he adopts an ancient Chinese tale about human suffering and greed in the construction of the Great Wall and draws out startling insights about the way of Jesus in the Asian experience.

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the compassionate God. He is the incarnation of God’s passion or redeeming love for all people. Since this love of God becomes incarnate in human flesh, in the humanity of the man Jesus, God’s love is working among even the marginalized and suffering people of Asia. In other words, all nations are eligible for the salvation wrought by God in Jesus. A transposition of this salvation from the Judeo-Christian history to the history of Asian nations is therefore possible and necessary. This is the basic thrust of Song’s argument in The Compassionate God. The biggest road-block to this transposition is historical and
theological centrism, that is, the belief that God's salvation has a fixed centre.

From the perspective of incarnation, Song argues for a multi-centred theology, a theology which seeks to discern and express the redemptive love of God in every place and time. This is what he attempts in his Theology from the Womb of Asia. It is in the depth of Asian humanity and spirituality that the truth of God's love incarnate in Christ may be found. Thus in Tell Us Our Names - Story Theology from an Asian Perspective, Song proposes that the stories, folktales, traditions, poetry etc., depicting the cultures of Asian people, their religious aspirations and experiences in history are all viable mediums of God's redemptive revelation. They are all important vehicles for reflecting upon, encountering and discerning the love of God incarnate in creation.

Clearly, Song's thoughts as they develop in his writings are primarily directed toward the Asian response to the Christian faith in terms of contemporary reality. How do Asian Christians respond to the biblical faith centred on the love of God in Christ, in view of their actual living experience of the present and their vision of the future? Song himself confirms that the "focus" of many of his writings is on the area of "interactions between the Christian faith and contemporary social (political and cultural) religious situation, especially those of Asia." The questions that immediately come to mind are as follows: By focusing particularly on the Asian context, what theological purpose

9 Quoted in Hal May, loc. cit.,
does he have in mind? Or, what is the objective of his theological programme? What are the main concerns underlying his theological efforts? How does he see the task of theology and how does he proceed to carry this out? These questions shall serve to guide us in the rest of this chapter.

C. His Theology: A Fresh Look at the Incarnation.

C. S. Song does his theology from two starting points. The first is his existential perspective as an Asian, not just as an Asian but as a Chinese Christian. As such, he wishes to affirm two things: the first is his Chinese and Asian heritage, its histories, cultures, religions, ideologies; and the second is the heritage that the Christian tradition has brought to Asia.

The second perspective is his theological apprehension that Mission is central to the Christian message. Mission began with Creation; it was manifested in the Incarnation and it has called humankind to be involved with God in new ways throughout the ages. This is tied in with all the doctrines of the faith. Mission loses its universality when it becomes divorced from creation. Mission must be seen as relating to Jesus Christ who manifested for all peoples God’s saving love. But more than this, mission is seen in terms of the Incarnation. God’s mission began at Creation. But in the Incarnation we find the essence of that mission. Divine mission therefore can be said to be essentially a mission of incarnation.
1. Incarnation Restated.

In Song's exposition of this doctrine, he uses a number of different terms in an effort to restate it. Firstly, incarnation is "the enfleshment of God."\(^{10}\) It is Godself taking up human flesh so that God as Creator becomes what God had created. It is "God going out of Himself to become embodied in particular historical persons and events."\(^{11}\) In the particular human being called Jesus Christ, God imparts Godself to the world in order that the world may be redeemed to God. Such an act is one of self-denial because in taking up human flesh, God is becoming what God is not. This must entail risk; the risk of God losing identity. Yet by becoming other than God is, God reveals Godself as what God truly is; a personal God who loves the world which He created, and who is involved intimately with it. Jesus Christ is therefore God's identification with creation; he is God's being in flesh. By taking on flesh, God is including humanity in God's divinity so that we witness in the incarnation God's affirmation of creation.

God's enfleshment in Jesus Christ is also God's redeeming presence in creation; it is God being with humanity in its fallen state. This is what K. Kitamori means when he says, "God himself had to enter the world of real sin in order to bear the responsibility of real sin."\(^{12}\) It is only by showing

\(^{10}\) See, CMR, Chap. 3.

\(^{11}\) ibid., p. 51.

\(^{12}\) ibid., p. 52.
solidarity with humankind as a human being that God is able to begin reconciliation and redemption in human terms. Jesus Christ is therefore the manifestation of God's solidarity and presence with humanity in the latter's sin and salvation.

According to Song, Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection signify and affirm this divine-human solidarity. The cross symbolizes the most extreme horror and utter despair of life. Yet the cross is precisely the place where he is identified as God. The cross and all that it symbolizes is where we find God; wherever we find suffering, injustice, meaninglessness and death, God is there both before us and with us. This means that it is out of the seeming meaninglessness of the flesh and its death that God begins new life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Incarnation as God's enfleshment therefore takes seriously God's involvement with the world both as its creator and its redeemer. Enfleshment means that, through God's denial of God's own self to the point of death on the cross, a new humanity comes into being. It means that through God's affirmation of creation, redemption is made possible for all human beings. In the event of Jesus Christ the fullness of

13 For Song, Jesus' crucifixion symbolizes the darkest abyss of human existence. The cross represents the most extreme horror inflicted on life; the utmost despair. Yet it is at the foot of the cross that the Roman centurion recognizes Jesus as the Son of God, (Mark 15. 39). This identification of Jesus as God at the cross leads Song to the insight that God is not disclosed in the places of respectability and security but in the agonies of the world. "Until God dies on the cross, we do not know where God is." C. S. Song, "God's Mission with the Nations," in A Vision for Man, ed., Samuel Amirtham (Madras: CLS, 1978), p. 232ff. In other words, God is found wherever human beings experience suffering and despair.
God's creative and redemptive love for the world becomes manifest.

The second term used to explain the incarnation is the "humanisation of God."¹⁴ In his interpretation of the story of the Fall (Genesis 3), Song characterizes the human condition as the "loss of his proper creatureliness," of essential humanity.¹⁵ This is evident in three aspects. The first is the loss of identity.¹⁶ The second facet is the problem of dehumanisation.¹⁷ The third one Song mentions is "estrangement"—estrangement from God, other human beings and him/herself. In being estranged from God humankind is denying that its humanity is derived from the divinity of God. This estrangement leads to being estranged from fellow humans, so that trust and love are replaced by suspicion and hatred, and shows that humankind becomes a self-seeking being. In this way human beings affect themselves; "he becomes aware of his nakedness and becomes ashamed of it."¹⁸ However, God chooses to deal with the condition of humanity, to help humankind

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¹⁴ CMR, p. 212

¹⁵ ibid., p. 207.

¹⁶ Loss of identity means that human beings have to find their place in creation now that it is no longer taken for granted that they are creatures of God.

¹⁷ ibid., p. 209. This refers to the problem of humanity today where a person is judged not by what (s)he is as the creature of God, but by the produce (s)he has had a part in bringing into existence. One is treated, and treats others, as if one is a unit of production rather than a person.

¹⁸ ibid., p. 211. Shame for Song means the disorder of our being, so that we are aware that we are not in harmony with God or our fellow human beings. The breaking of this harmony means the divorce of our humanity from the divinity of God.
regain its creatureliness, to become human again, that is, to bring about the humanisation of all people. Since humankind is unable to accomplish this on its own, God humanises Godself in Jesus Christ. The incarnation is therefore the event in which God makes Godself available to human beings in human terms, so that by becoming human God makes it possible for humankind to become once again God’s partner. In Jesus Christ, God goes all the way to make Godself available and accessible to human beings. He is Emmanuel - God with us (Mt. 1: 33). In the man Jesus Christ, we see God and through him God has shown us what it means to be human, that is, what true humanity is. In Jesus Christ, the barrier between God and humanity on account of sin is broken. A new God-man relationship emerges. Jesus Christ is this new God-man relationship. He is what it means to be human, to be a created being, to be a creature. In this sense, Jesus Christ is the new humanity; He is God’s new creation.

The third term is the "relativisation of God." Like the other two terms already discussed, it points to the way in which God makes Godself known and available to the world. For the Christian, the self-revelation of God is revelation in and through Jesus Christ. But in Jesus, God has become a human

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19 It is in these same terms that Karl Barth could speak of the humanity of God. See, The Humanity of God, (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 33-64. In Jesus Christ, God stands where we stand. He is present at every critical moment of our life. He is our Partner, Brother, Friend and the One in whom we can confide without reservation.

being, "a man born to the conditions and limitations in which we live and breathe and have our being." This means that God relativises Godself in order that humankind may have access to God. It recognizes too that the world view has changed. The absolute time and absolute space of Newtonian physics whereby all followed a predetermined course, including human life, are, through the revolution caused by Einstein's theories, now seen to be relative. That means that change is seen as the basic dynamic of society, with new possibilities continually opening up.

For Song, "openness is the key word for this relativised world." And it is precisely in this openness that he sees the act of "self-emptying" which inevitably creates the possibility of readiness for others. That is, a being ready and open to respond to the needs of others. According to the witness of the gospels, Song points out, Jesus met people in their own needs and on their terms. His complete openness is demonstrated in the fact that he accepted others without pre-condition, reservation, claim or self-assertion. God's relativisation in Jesus Christ is therefore the total self-giving of God's being in response to the needs of humanity. It is the renunciation of all that Jesus is as God for the sake of accepting others.

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21 ibid., p. 244


Jesus' death highlights this total self-denial of God. The cross, in Song's words, "comes close to the suicide of God." However, by God's act of self-emptying, by being totally open to the world, room is created for receiving and accepting estranged human beings. God's act of self-emptying in Christ therefore marks the beginning of a new form of being and a new set of relationships. The resurrection showed this new being in Jesus Christ; the new man, the God-man who brings forth new life from the midst of death.

It is on this ground that incarnation becomes the hope of salvation for humankind. In spite of sin which characterizes the human condition since the Fall, God never gives up humanity. God remains with creation. God's commitment to creation is expressed in terms of the "covenant" by Old Testament writers. The first covenant is with Noah, where God binds Godself irreversibly "with" the world (Gen.

24 CMR, p. 73.

25 Song interprets the Fall account as a story which attempts to answer why there is a disruption between humankind's existential and essential nature. (CMR, p. 207) The Fall arises from the conflict of man within himself, which is an effort to break out of the frame of space and time to which he is ordained. These divinely ordained limitations become unbearable and humankind questions the legitimacy of God's injunction. At this point humanity rises up and tries to take its own destiny into its own hand (CMR, p. 145); c.f. "Reconciliation and the Church: The Freedom of Christian Witness," Reformed & Presbyterian World, Vol. 31 (Autumn 1970), p. 67. Seeing this as the origin of sin, Song goes on to claim that sin has not only infected and distorted the very nature of humanity, it has also infringed on the very nature of God, namely love. By human disobedience, humanity moves out of harmony with God; estrangement from both God and other human beings result. This invades God's capacity to love by threatening to leave God's love objectless. C. S. Song, "Love of God-and-Man in Action: Doing Theology with Asian Spirituality," in Doing Theology Today, ed., C. S. Song (Madras: CLS, 1976), p. 59.
9: 17). Song calls this a "redemptive with." The covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17: 2) further emphasizes this "with-ness" of God and creation. According to Song, God takes the initiative because of Love and through the covenant relationship, God makes it possible for Godself to be with humanity. In Jesus Christ, God has graciously reclaimed creation even though the world rejects God as Creator and Redeemer. (2 Cor. 5: 19). Thus in Christ Jesus, God has brought about reconciliation with humankind. God has accomplished the reopening of relationships between Godself and humanity and between human beings themselves. With this reconciliation accomplished in Christ, humanity is assured a new lease on life and given hope for the future.

In Jesus Christ God takes humanity into Godself totally, even to the point of death on the cross. The cross symbolizes all that is terrible, dehumanising and evil. It stands for pain, suffering, agony and death. It represents the end of hope and the triumph of meaninglessness and folly. Yet it is out of this very meaninglessness of Jesus' cross that the resurrection comes, life from death, liberation from suffering. Through the resurrection new hope is given and new creation begun in the raising up of the new God-man.


27 Song understands 'Reconciliation' as the "power which compels humankind to forsake its inhumanity and accept the humanity which God has shown in Jesus Christ." CMR, p. 224.

Resurrection means that death is no longer the end of hope but is in fact the beginning of hope. It has shown God's future for the world, that is, God affirms the goodness of creation, and that creation has meaning. Thus it opens up new dimensions for understanding the history of nations and peoples, and imparts to Christians a mission of building new life and planting new hope and a new future in those places where meaninglessness has made havoc of life.29

2. Christological Centre.

As can be well inferred from the preceding section, the centre of the Christian faith for Song is Jesus Christ crucified, raised and enthroned as risen Lord. He writes,

The christian faith stands or falls on the Word becoming flesh, on God becoming a human person, on the divine becoming the human, on the life and history of God becoming the life and history of human beings.30

Christian faith hinges on God's movement towards humanity, on God's taking upon Godself the life and history of humankind. It is with God incarnate in Jesus Christ (the Word become flesh) that theology has to contend. Hence, in Song's scheme, christology is basic to theology. What is Song's christological confession?


In the first place, christology is fundamentally active and practical. Jesus Christ is "God's pain-loving enmanned." He is the concrete manifestation of the God who acts for us. He shows us the God who is capable of pain-loving for the sake of humanity. In Jesus Christ God as divine love and humanity as human love meet to create a new person oriented both to God and humanity. He is the love of the God-man in action. Theology, which takes its cue from Jesus Christ, must also be the love of the God-man in action. Theology does not have to do with the metaphysics of love. From beginning to end it has to do with love in action.32

Song believes that theology finds its beginning and its goal in the incarnate Love of God manifested in Jesus Christ and which continues to manifest itself in the world.33 Theology is "a hermeneutics of the love of the God-Man active in human community."34 It has to do with interpreting and expressing this love of God in Jesus Christ, an interpretation and expression which involves an active response, (i.e. action). For this reason Song denotes the seeking to "reflect on this love and to set this love in motion" in the human community, as "the authentic doing of theology."35


32 TET, p. 78.
33 ibid., p. 54.
34 ibid., p. 91.
35 ibid., p. 98.
To Song, theology is as much an activity of the heart as of the intellect.

The heart is endowed with the power to cross the boundary of reason. It perceives the transrational that eludes a rational analysis of phenomena ... and above all, it intuits the mystery of Being at the point where reason fails to grasp the latter.36

Rather than indulge in speculation on the nature and essence of God, theologians have to reflect on the mystery of creation and the experience of redemption. Theology is response to the pain-love, the heartache, of God." Song contrasts this with the view of theology as the rational activity of asking the questions about God which will disclose God's rationality and the inherent rationality of the divine revelation, quoting T. F. Torrance with disapproval.37 God is not susceptible to this rational grasping for God's essence. Theology has to be intuitive in a way that is deeply ingrained in Asian culture.38 Song sets up a polarity of academic theology, which is interested in metaphysics of God but not God's concrete acts in society and history, and theology which begins with stories of human suffering and joy.40 Theology is "not to be learned but to be lived; it is not to be thought but to be

36 ibid., p. 57.

37 Song takes God to be the 'theologian par excellence.' Since God's theology begins from God's heart - "God's heart aches when the world is gripped with pain and suffering" - so must our theology also. ibid., p. 40.

38 ibid., p. 43f.

39 ibid., p. 45ff.

40 ibid., p. 80.
experienced."41

Of course, Christian theology is about Jesus Christ. The stories about Jesus feature prominently in Song’s writing, together with the stories of Asia. But who is Jesus?

In Jesus we have to do with a very special person for whom the end is the beginning. His end on the cross, transformed by the resurrection, becomes the beginning of the faith that is capable of turning the world upside down.42

Jesus is the new humanity. He is the God-man whose death frees God’s salvation from Jewish captivity, releases God’s redeeming power in human community, and re-shapes the world through the sweat and blood of peoples struggling for freedom and love against all manner of social and political odds.43

On the cross the narrow messianic expectations of Judaism were broken down in favour of God’s salvific purpose for the whole of humanity. The cross of Jesus has moved God out of the Holy of Holies and disclosed the divine presence in the outer court. As a result, theology has to "seek to meet this God not only in Israel, not only in those western nations nurtured in 'Christian' culture, but also in Latin America, Africa, and Asia."44

The resurrection broadens our understanding of God’s love. "The risen Christ directs Peter and the other disciples to a wider world, to 'the least of his brethren'."45 For Song,

41 ibid., p. 82.
42 TCG, p. 87.
43 ibid., p. 92.
44 ibid., p. 96.
45 ibid., p. 106f.
Jesus is to be understood fundamentally as the suffering Messiah. As such, Jesus stands on the side of all those who suffer. He is the prototype of "little suffering messiahs" throughout human history. He becomes embodied in the suffering messiahs of the suffering people of Israel, in Egypt, in France, in the United States, in China, in Brazil." While the world looks for political messiahs, God looks for suffering messiahs. More than that, "God does not only look for them [suffering messiahs], but becomes the suffering messiah in Jesus Christ."  

Suffering is an important aspect of Song's christological formulation. According to him, suffering is where God and human beings meet. It is at the cross that the Roman centurion recognizes Jesus as God. It is therefore not improper to say that the incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ is there in the suffering of human beings. And in Asia, it is not impossible to discern the love of God at work amidst the suffering of humanity. Hence the task of the Church is to witness to that divine love and seek to transform it into the power of suffering unto hope.  

Song conceives of God's activity in the world as a mission of incarnation; it is a mission of redemption and reconciliation. In Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word, God comes to redeem the whole world, all creation. To Song, the Word is not an abstraction but is part of the very being of God which participated in creation and then dwelt in this creation in

"ibid., p. 108.

"ibid., p. 113."
his Son. Through Jesus Christ, humankind is able to see the incarnation of God's mission and thus Christian mission, to be Christian, must take on the nature and task of God's mission. Likewise, theology as part of the mission of the Christian church in Asia must take seriously the incarnational perspective if the message of the gospel is to reach the hearts and souls of the Asian peoples.

D. Theological Method.

In examining Song's methodology, it would be necessary to proceed by way of individual themes which, taken together would give us a better idea of the way he does his theology. These are: (1) the main concerns of Song, (2) the task of Asian theologians, (3) Song's method of doing theology, and (4) Tools for theological reflection. Let us now turn to the reasons behind Song's theological efforts.

1. Methodological and Theological Concerns.

Noticeably two major concerns underlie much of Song's theological thinking; one methodological and the other theological. Regarding the former, Song views Asian Christian theology as being "overweight."

It could hardly walk or run with its huge belly of undigested food - a belly crammed with schools of theology, theories of biblical interpretation, Christian views of cultures and religions, all originating from the church in the West."

" TWA, p. 3."
Its obesity increased when the histories, religions and cultures of Asia began to compete for room in that overloaded belly. What Song is searching for is a cure for this obesity; for freedom to meet God within Asian humanity and to identify God’s world within the Asian world. Biblical history and Asian history have to be intertwined, and Jesus has to be encountered within Asian spirituality."

There is no question that this search for a cure has been with Song from an early stage of his writing career. In his article, "The Decisiveness of Christ," Song describes his efforts as an attempt to provide the preliminary conditions in order "to facilitate the birth of an Asian "theological child."" He sees his preliminary task as that of making some preparatory suggestions as to how Asian Christians can reformulate Christian theology in terms that are relevant and intelligible in the context of Asia. His main objective is thus an effort at reconstructing Christian theology in such a way that the Asian perspective may have a prominent place in theological reflection.

What is envisaged is theological reflection upon the meaning of the gospel that takes the particularity of the Asian context with all seriousness; Asia with all its historical experience of neo-colonialism, suffering, poverty, injustice as well as its diversity of cultures, religions, ideologies and so on. It is a quest for a theology which speaks to and out of the faith experience of about two-thirds

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49 ibid., p. 3.

of the world's population; a theology which is truly "Asian" in form, composition and orientation.

Song believes that for such a distinctively Asian theology to come to birth, a proper methodology is needed; one that is radically different from the ecclesiastically-based methodological approach\(^1\) which has characterized traditional mission theology of 19th C. An appropriate methodology for theological pursuit is of basic necessity because it can guide Asian Christians to the truth of the Gospel. Such a task is of top priority for Asian Christians.

\(^1\) The type of methodology that Song is advocating is one which allows theological activity to be free from the stranglehold of the institutionalized Church. In a number of articles, Song voices his criticism of much traditional theology which tends to regard the Church rather than "God" and the "world" as the last reality with which to be concerned. For so long, traditional theology has had the Church as its presupposition and the interests of the Church as its sole objective. But this is wrong because it makes a caricature of what God does in the world through Jesus Christ. God's creative and redemptive work is not limited to the Church but has the whole world as its object. Song frequently makes the same point most emphatically in relation to theological education in Asia. He writes: "Both in thinking of the context in which we work in the Church and of the goal we pursue, it seems easy to accept and propagate the idea that the last reality with which we are concerned is the Church itself, and that the summary commandment we obey is to love Christianity with heart, soul, mind and strength. This exaltation of the church or of Christianity leads us then to an effort not to reconcile men with God, or to re-direct their love and ours towards God and their neighbour, but rather to convert them to Christianity." Quoted from Richard Niebuhr et. al., The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry, in "Theological Education - A Search for a New Break Through," SEAJT, Vol. 9, no. 4 (April 1968), p. 6. See also, "The Christian Ministry and Theological Education," SEAJT, Vol. 6, no. 4 & Vol. 7, no. 1 (Apr-Jul., 1965), pp. 73-78; "Theological Education and Diversified Ministries," IRM, Vol. 56, no. 2 (April 1967), pp. 167-172.
Theological thinkers in the East should spare no effort in search of a proper theological method so that they will be led to theology which proves to be faithful and obedient to the Incarnate Lord.  

For Song, a new theological era has begun. The time has arrived for Asian theologians to do their own theology. It is therefore a matter of great urgency that "the quest for a valid and relevant theological finger must constitute the first chapter" of this new era for theology in Southeast Asia.  

The second major concern involves the question of salvation and the Christian interpretation of it. Of central theological significance to Song is the issue of the meaning of the salvation history embodied in Israel/Church for the Asian peoples. In an important article entitled "From Israel to Asia - A Theological Leap," Song calls into question the traditional idea that there has been only one salvation


history and that all nations and cultures must be included in that one salvation history. He writes,

The people of Israel were singled out, under a divine providence inexplicable to us and even to them, not to present themselves to the rest of the world as the nation through which God's redeeming love would be mediated, but to be a symbol of how God would also deal redemptively with other nations. ... An Asian nation will thus be enabled to find its place side by side with Israel in God's salvation. The Old Testament has shown how the history of a nation can be experienced and interpreted redemptively. If this is so, the theology which regards Israel and the Christian Church as the only bearers and dispensers of God's saving love must be called into question."

The heart of the quotation is in the last sentence. The primary focus of discussion is on the Old Testament (Israel). What is the theological relevance of the story of Israel for Asian peoples?

In many of Song's writings, this question has remained a constant motif. "How do we discern God's working out His saving plan for the Asian people?". How is the impact of God's saving acts to be seen and interpreted within the cultures and histories outside the immediate influence of the Christian Church? What are the biblical and theological grounds whereby Asian Christian thinkers can and must engage in theological reflection on the basis of a direct relation of God's redemption to Asia?" "How is God manifested in the

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"C. S. Song, "From Israel to Asia - A Theological Leap," The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 28, no. 3 (July 1976), p. 256."
life and history of the nations beyond the orbit of the Christian Church?"

Song is critical of traditional Christian theology and mission, especially in its western formulation and practice. Christian interpretation of history is one area he is most unhappy with and it is that which motivates his concern here. Song is convinced that the Christian Church has, in her theology and practice of mission, failed to take seriously the historical pluralism which constitutes the reality of the present world and especially Asia. He believes that western theology has not been able to develop a theology of history that provides room for the nations and peoples of extra-biblical tradition. So-called non-Christian peoples have hardly come to the purview of theology proper. Their place in Christian theology, if any, is merely nominal.

Even in missiology and missionary operations where they come under the concentrated assault of Christian concern, the central question is not their legitimate place in the history of salvation in the contexts of their histories and cultures. Instead they are viewed as targets of missionary efforts to win men and women to Christianity. Treated as objects of religious conversion, churches made up of these "pagans" consequently become understood as an "extension of western

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58 TCG, pp. 83 & 160.
59 CMR, p. 31.
According to Song, the failure of the western theology to allot a positive place to the histories of the nations is due to an interpretation of God's revelation in Christ which concentrates massively on the continuity of the history of Israel and the Christian Church as summed up in the concept of Heilsgeschichte. By over-emphasizing the event of Jesus Christ as a particular historical event in the history of the Jewish nation and the Church, other histories tend to be thought of as having no intrinsic meanings of their own. Such interpretation of God's saving work in the world is based on false and exclusive claims to the truth of God. And it smacks of what he calls "Christian centrism" which is dangerous because it tends to monopolize and domesticate God by treating God as an extension of a particular people. Also, it suffers from "historical particularism" and it leads to "sacramental

61 CMR, p. 31.

62 Centrism is the belief that there is only one centre from which the truth or reality can be viewed. The Israelite belief that God's salvation is confined within the bounds of their history, as demonstrated by Jonah's refusal to heed God's call to go to Nineveh, is an example of centrism. The tendency of Christians to view others from a Christian perspective - as demonstrated in the use of the word "non-christian" - is another example. Centrism operates at practically every level. In human relationships centrism takes the form of egotism. My likes and dislikes become normative. My thought and my behaviour become binding. I set the rules of the game and lay down the regulations of the play. Those who come into the orbit of my life are mere extensions of my ego. In relation to the question of salvation which Christians took to be in the custody of the Church, Song writes: "Centrism, in short, makes us blind to how God is at work in other persons, of all sorts of conditions." TCG, pp. 16-7, 64, 79-80, 131-36.

63 TCG, p. 47.
ecclesiasticism", that is, the view that the church institutionally and hierarchically constituted is God's answer to human salvation."

From the point of view of Heilsgeschichte, people in the histories and cultures outside western Christendom are regarded as redeemable insofar as they are salvaged for salvation history represented and embodied in the history of Israel and the Church." In this respect, Christian theology of history has been "proxy" theology, that is, it assumes that people outside Christendom can only gain salvation only through the proxy of the church." But to think of other histories and peoples in terms of proxy will no longer do, for such an understanding of history and salvation is not only inadequate but biblically and theologically untenable.

For one thing, such an understanding cannot but impoverish the richness of God's creation. For another, it does not tally with the Christian confession of God as Creator and redeemer, Lord of history. Moreover, it stands against the biblical affirmation of the 'Word become flesh.' Any christian interpretation of history, Song claims, must be built upon the Incarnation because Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, is the centre of our faith.

For Song, the question of salvation history has to do basically with the relation of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Asian context. Traditionally, it has been

" "From Israel to Asia - A Theological Leap," p. 256.
" TCG, p. 39.
thought that Christian revelation and the Asian context have nothing to do with each other. The two are poles apart. But Song argues that these entities are not disjunctive. Christian revelation takes place within a particular context. The two are linked up by virtue of the incarnation. The fact that the "Word became flesh" (John 1:14) confirms that revelation and context have become united.

The incarnation of the Word in human flesh means revelation has become contextualized. "Revelation became context! Revelation is in context!" This means that God in Christ has become incarnate in all human beings. God is in the world, in creation. Or, more specifically, God in Christ is incarnate in Asian humanity. Jesus Christ the incarnation of God's love is present in Asia redeeming and reconciling Asian humanity to Godself.

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"TUN, p. 40.

"In interpreting this Johannine text, the crucial term is the verb 'became' (egeneto) which relates the Word and flesh. It suggests a fundamental change in the subject of the action - Godself. Christian faith is based on this active change involving God himself.

"ibid., p. 43."
2. Task of Asian Theologians.

What then is the task of a theologian? Primarily, faithfulness and "obedience to the Incarnate Lord" is what Song suggests. It must be pointed out that in Song's earlier writings, there is an implicit note of urgency found concerning the need for Asian Christians to be responsible participants in the theological task of the Church to witness to God's salvation manifested in Jesus Christ. Song suggests that by and large, the Asian Church has been unduly complacent about her own theological responsibility. Instead of reflecting theologically on the contents of the Christian faith in the light of the Bible and its bearing on their own experience of history, Asian Christians have been content to be "fed by the indigestible food provided by the Western churches." So content were they with theological formulations worked out in the West that there was hardly any effort to articulate their response to the Gospel in their own terms and in the light of their own faith experience. The prevailing notion in the East, namely, that the only valid theology was Western theology, was a clear reflection of this theological complacency.

Critical of this state of affairs within the Asian church, Song warns that such complacency is contrary to the


Christian vocation. It amounts to, following Barthian usage, 'disobedience' to the demands of the Gospel. Hence he calls for what he calls "the obedience of theology in Asia." Song, claims that wherever and whenever Christian theology is being worked out, it is always to do with the articulation of the Church's understanding of her beliefs, the central of which involves the revelation of God's redemptive love for humankind. Theology has to do with the human response in faith to what God in Christ has done for the salvation of all creation.

Now for the Asian response to be really true to the Christian knowledge of God, the articulation of the faith must seek to be faithful also to its "sitz im leben." The expression of the faith must seek to make real theological sense of the living situation of Asian peoples. Since "it is impossible to imagine a timeless and spaceless man entering into dialogue with God," it is quite obvious that an Asian

72 The became the title of one Song's earliest articles. See note no. 56.

73 Drawing on the insights of St. Paul (Gal. 4:9) and St. John (Jn. 15:16), Song claims that we cannot know God but God makes himself known to us. "Our knowledge of God does not come from within ourselves but from outside, from God himself." ("The Obedience of Theology in Asia," p. 8). In another article, he writes: "God is the ultimate ground which enables us to speak about Him in a way that is significant. God is final mystery which is beyond human comprehension and rationalization. God is the wholly Other and the great Unknown. We are allowed to have a glimpse of this mystery only to the extent that God is willing to disclose Godself to us. Our apprehension and comprehension of God is in proportion to the extent God makes Godself known to us." See "The Possibility of Analogical Discourse on God," SEAJT, Vol. 7, no. 2 (October 1965), p. 64. Song's epistemology resembles very much that of Barth.

74 "The Obedience of Theology in Asia," p. 9.
theology cannot begin anywhere but from Asia. Theological truths for Asians are to be found right here in the womb of Asia. 75

What Song is suggesting is that the Asian response to the Christian revelation of God in Christ ought to be worked out within the concrete situation of human existence in Asia. This, in part, is what is meant by the "obedience of theology in Asia." And this is the task of every theologian. Since Christians are called to bear witness to God's salvation manifested in the 'Word become flesh,' it is the responsibility of Asian Christians to carry out this task in the light of the life and thought with which Asians are organically bound. Such a responsibility cannot be dodged without falsifying their theological response.

If theologians or Church leaders in Asia still keep on putting off fulfilling this important task and satisfying themselves with repeating what Western theologians have said in the past and are saying at the present time, no true theological response will come out of the Asian soil. 76

Song also believes that for Asian theologians to be "faithful and obedient to the Incarnate Lord," they ought to be self-critical. Moreover, they ought to be more critical of other theological formulations and not just be passive receivers. The "obedience of theology" must include readiness to analyze the statements of others in order to discern truth from falsehood and to make critical theological judgement on

75 TWA, p. 18.

76 "The Obedience of Theology in Asia," p. 9.
them." Song suggests that,

As far as Asia is concerned, we should direct ruthless questions at the validity and relevance of accepting social, ethical and cultural norms and ethos developed out of the experiences of the Church in the West during the period in which she was making exclusive claims to the truth of God."

He goes on to argue that for the Christian gospel to have a renewing and redemptive impact on the life of people in Asia, the Christian Church (Asian) must first be liberated from the imposition of the so-called parent Church in the West." Not only should the Asian Church cease to regard itself as an extension of Western Christendom as traditionally perceived, it should also break free from what he calls the "Babylonian captivity" to Western dominance in matters of theological interpretation."

In sum, to be obedient and responsible Christians means consciously attempting to express the content of the Christian faith in forms and modes of thought that are not dictated by western theology but endemic to the Asian experiences. It means doing theology "first-hand" using the "indigenous resources of Asia" - resources related to the lives of people, resources from cultures, religions, histories, in short, resources that reveal the struggles and aspirations of peoples

79 ibid., p. 253.
and nations of Asia throughout the centuries. It means reflecting upon the content of the faith with a keen and conscious awareness of what goes on around. It means trying to respond to the demands of the gospel in the light of our involvement and solidarity with the peoples. This is what Song calls theologizing with a 'seeing, hearing and understanding heart.'

We must do our theology with our minds open to the struggles of other religious minds. We must go about our theological business with our ears open to the cries of the hearts muffled by the merriment, laughter and shouts at religious festivals. And we must carry on our theology with our eyes open to the rays of hope that struggle to shine out from within the Asian community battling to be set free from oppressive socio-political forces.

A practical task resulting from this obedience is the interpretation of Asian histories. According to Song, the task of the theologian is to interpret what (s)he sees and hears when deeply immersed in the life of his/her place and time. A theologian must be an interpreter of the history of his/her own people and culture. For Asia, this means seeking to "decode the codes" God has implanted in the lives of Asian peoples; to identify "the signs of the times" and to discern "God-meaning in human suffering and hopes" that take form in

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2 TUN, p. 42.

3 TWA, p. 21.

4 ibid., p. 22.

5 ibid., pp. 26-29.
Asian cultures, histories and religions."

Beginning from the assumption that God works redemptively in the histories of all nations, Song argues that there are "theological meanings," or "theo-logical forces" embedded in the history of every nation. The task of a theologian of history therefore is to identify and interpret such theo-logical forces in the life of individual persons, in a community, in a nation, and the world.

Love is one such theological force. As an act, love has redemptive power. This is so because love itself constitutes the essence of God." For Song, interpreting history therefore enables Asians to encounter God in their own nations; it allows them to gain a glimpse of God's creative and redemptive design for their part of the world." In this new interpretation Asian theologians witness to the signs of future possibilities within the past and present.

Another factor underlying Song's plea for the "obedience of theology in Asia" is his conviction regarding the inadequacy and irrelevancy of the Western mode of theological reflection for the Asian situation. In his mind, much of the theology developed in the West and perpetrated by Asians has failed to meet its purpose, namely, serving the church in its essential mission of leading people to reconciliation and

" TUN, p. 36.

" C. S. Song, "Recovering Theological Meanings in our Histories," ATESEA Occasional Papers, no. 3 (1985), pp. 7-17.

" TCG, pp. 35, 77.
redemption wrought by God in Jesus Christ." China serves as an example of this failure of Christian theology in its western form." Despite the many years of Christian mission in China and the keen optimism which inspires mission work in that country, the final result is that Communism (a new-comer), not Christianity, has won the hand of the Chinese people.

As for the causes of this failure, Song points to the "theological stagnancy" right at the centre of the Christian faith." Mission theology has become so dogmatic and static that it fails to show how the meaning of the love of God relates itself to the life of individuals, nations, or the world, in the realities which affect their daily living." Content only with "giving correct answers to questions which nobody wants to ask," to use William Temple's words, such theology lacks the vitality required to make the Christian Gospel worth its salt in Asia. And in this respect, it becomes irrelevant.

Thus, as a Taiwanese Christian, Song asserts that the most pressing task of the Church is to develop a "vital and relevant theology." What is meant by this is explained thus:

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9 See "Theological Education - A Search for a New Break Through," pp. 6-8.


92 "New China and Salvation History," p. 54.
A theology can be 'vital' only in so far as it is in possession of inner dynamis to create room for the Gospel in the midst of indifference, self-complacency and antagonism which beset the church from within and from without. A theology can be 'relevant' only in so far as it serves the church in its essential task of leading men, Christian and non-Christian alike, to the miracle of reconciliation and redemption of God become incarnate in Jesus Christ."

As Song sees it, theology in Asia, if it is to be relevant and vital, must be a "theology of the way" (theologia viatorum); that is to say, a theology which does not stay still but moves forward with the times and the changing situations of human life. Theologia viatorum is thus always open to the future. It remains open to the challenges of secularization and modernization which are affecting life of the Church today. Without compromising the absolute nature of the kerygma, theologia viatorum seeks to be flexible and mobile in terms of method. Also it must always be "self-critical", examining its contents in the light of the Gospel which it is commissioned to interpret and communicate to the world.

Song claims that the goal of such theology can properly be understood only in relation to the concept of service. Theologia viatorum is "a liberated theology in the service of its Lord Jesus Christ." It is a theology on the way to serve

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94 ibid., p. 116.
95 ibid., p. 122.
96 See, "Whither Protestantism in Asia," p. 73; "Theological Education - A Search for a New Break Through," pp. 5-16.
Christ and the world - a theology that is "ready to move into areas in which its service is demanded." It is therefore not a theology worked out in ivory towers, rather, it is one done by theologians who are deeply aware of the tragic conditions of people for whom the gospel is intended. It is theology which serves to communicate the redemptive work of God in the world to Asian people in the midst of all they experience in their life situations.

In this respect, a vital and relevant theology must be a "living theology;" one which asks the right questions of the Bible in order to obtain relevant answers to those "particular problems and issues that make Asia a different entity from the rest of the world." In Song's view, only a theology which seeks to speak to and out of the peculiar experiences of Asia can be deemed viable and relevant in Asia. Only such a theology is capable of addressing the most crucial question, namely, how to infuse God's redemptive power into cultures, religions and literature of Asia so that

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9 ibid., p. 121.

9 TWA, pp. 81, 86.

10 Song argues that for a theology to be viable and relevant in any particular context, it has to begin with problems and issues which are paramount in that context. For Asian theologians for example, "it is Asia infected with colonialism and neo-colonialism; Asia pregnant with aspirations of teeming humanity for better, meaningful and liberated life" that they have to be concerned with. It is the particularity of this Asian situation that demands some kind of theological answer and Christian action. This does not in any way diminish the universal dimension of the theological task. What happens is that the more particular one tries to become, the more one discovers that one is in touch with the problems that lie at the very heart of humanity. See, "The Decisiveness of Christ," p. 257ff.
transformation of them from within might be realized.  

Another task of the Asian theologian derives directly from Song's concern with the Christian interpretation of history and its implications for other Asian religions and the cultures built upon them. For Song, there is a need for Asian theologians to provide a theology of history which takes into account the reality of non-Christian peoples and their place in God's work of salvation. Here, Song is particularly concerned with the colonial and imperialist attitude with which Western Christendom has viewed people of other faiths. This is well reflected in the mission theology of the Western church where mission is seen largely in terms of "conversion" or "Christianizing" non-Western lands. It is also reflected in missionary christology which speaks of Christ in exclusive terms such as "absoluteness, uniqueness and finality."  

Song locates the roots of the imposing influence and overpowering dominance of Western Christendom in its exclusive claims to the truth of God. But in his mind, such claims are misconceived because Christians do not have a monopoly on the truth of God. He writes, "What is held true and valid even in the most sacred tradition of faith has no automatic validity for those of us living in a different situation."  

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101 "The Obedience of Theology in Asia," p. 15.  


103 What Song means by this statement is this. Christian claims to the truth of God are based on Christian assumptions and beliefs. But Christian beliefs and assumptions cannot automatically be acceptable to a Buddhist or a Hindu as a
thing however, is that out of this misconception, the Christian Church in the West is led to the false belief that it has monopoly on Christian theology of history.

On account of the fact that Christianity has played an enormous role in Western civilization, the marriage between theology and western norms of thought and life has inevitably become the implicit assumption of doing theology. "It is the offspring of this marriage between theology and western civilization that have largely defined the rules of the game called Christian theology."¹⁰⁴ The trouble is that the theology born out of that marriage obviously cannot serve the spirituality that grows, develops and creates outside that particular framework. Why? Because the spirituality with which that theology wrestles is the spirituality largely confined to and understood in terms of the Christian Church.¹⁰⁵ The subject matter of theology is, in other words, "Christian" spirituality.¹⁰⁶

Song claims that traditional christian theology has to a large extent limited itself to the explications of the Christian faith handed down from the early church. It has made it its chief task to know God himself. Over the centuries, it has developed elaborate doctrines of God. And in most cases,


¹⁰⁴ TET, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ This is more or less the same point explained in note 51.

¹⁰⁶ TET, p. 5.
doctrines of God determine the rest of theological subject matters. The essential contents of Christian theology do not go beyond God, Christ, Holy Spirit, Church, Sacraments, etc.

Such a theology unfortunately is obviously incapable of addressing the reality of cultural and religious pluralism of Asia. It has proved to be too restrictive for a number of reasons. Emphasis on knowing God in himself tends to limit the scope of theological reflections to those traditional categories emphasized by the early church. The result is often the wrong impression created that matters of grave importance in the life of humanity are supposedly outside of christian theological concern.

It is also restrictive in the sense that it excludes from its theological purview the billions of Asian people who do not come into the orbit of the christian faith. In its interpretation of history it restricts the salvation wrought by God in Christ to the medium of Israel and the Christian Church. But in so doing, it fails to do justice to the central truth of the christian faith, namely, God in Christ redeems the whole world. How does Song try to resolve the problem? He suggests a new methodological approach.

\[\text{\footnotesize ibid., p. 3ff.}\]
3. Transpositional Theology.

Song himself calls his method a 'transpositional theology.' Transposition is a musical term which means shifting or changing the key of a musical piece to a higher or lower key. The music itself - the tune, notation, dynamics and variations - remains the same; only the key changes. Similarly, a transpositional theology has this idea of change (shift) as its basic premise. Transpositional theology is to do with change in theological method. It exercises a new and different way of doing theology.

Three main factors characterize this new method. Firstly, it presupposes and acknowledges that there has been a "shift in space and time" for theology. Not just a chronological shift but more importantly those changes in ideas and beliefs that determine human understanding of life and the world. Song calls these "paradigm-shifts," claiming that such shifts are happening today in Christian understanding of the faith.

Paradigms have shifted: from North to South, West to East, from top to bottom, opting for orthopraxies and not for orthodoxy, and siding with the oppressed, marginalized, alienated and poor. Three main examples of these paradigm-shifts are noted.

(1) There is the awakening of mass populations to a new consciousness regarding questions of human rights, dignity, justice, development, peace, etc., This new awakening is

\(^{108}\) TCG, p. 5.

manifesting itself in various kinds of "people's movements."

(2) There is the decentralization of Christian theological activity. Song asserts that the centre of theological reflection and action has definitely gravitated towards the third world.

Tubingen is no longer the centre of the theological world. North American theologians may still catch a cold when German theologians sneeze, not third-world theologians. Rome is not any more the ecclesiastical centre of the universal church...

And (3), there is the paradigm-shift with regard to power which once was in the hands of minority groups but now seems to be going to the common people. Ordinary folk, not the elitist groups are now becoming the makers of history or 'subjects of history' as the minjung theologians would say.

Secondly, transposition is the "communication" of the gospel message to people of different cultures and religious affiliation. A keyword in this process is 'translation,' that is, "rendering into another language, style, or manner of expression" the truth of the christian message. But this does not mean that the transposition of theology is just a formal or linguistic exercise. It has to do with the substance of the message which the church has to communicate.

Finally, transpositional theology is incarnational theology. It is so because it proceeds from the central affirmation of the Christian faith, namely, God in Christ has

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\[110\] ibid., p. 255.

\[111\] TCG, p. 8.

\[112\] ibid., pp. 9-10.
become one of us - "The Word becomes flesh." It is this God who changes, transposes and becomes flesh in the human being called Jesus Christ who judges and redeems human beings and the world. According to Song, transpositional theology is both a possibility and a necessity because it deals essentially with a "transpositional God" - a "moving and migrating God"\textsuperscript{113} - who does not stay put in one place but journeys with humanity in all directions; backwards, forward, sideways, even zig-zagging. The incarnate God of transpositional theology moves in and out of national frontiers, does away with religious boundaries, and transcends geographical barriers. In the cross of Jesus, this God moves out of the Holy of holies and makes the divine presence fully known in the outer court - in the "secular" oikoumene. The task of transpositional theology is therefore to seek to meet this God not only in Israel, not only in those western nations nurtured in Christian culture, but also in other nations where Christianity has had little influence.\textsuperscript{114}

(a) Transposing History of Salvation.

As we pointed out before, Song's main concern is to come to terms theologically with the question of God's salvation understood within the framework of the history of Israel and the Christian Church (salvation history) and how this relates to the majority of Asian peoples who are not christian. He

\textsuperscript{113} ibid., p. 30

\textsuperscript{114} ibid., p. 96.
claims that there needs to be a journey from Israel to Asia. The Gospel has to be expressed differently. There has to be a shift in theological discussion, to different subjects, to face new questions, and to discover alternative approaches. There has also to be a "transposition from the masculine God to the God who is experienced in the love and passion of women." 115

Song’s transpositional theology thus attempts to transpose the world of the biblical faith to the world of Asian cultures and religions so that Asian histories and peoples are put in direct relationship with the God who in Christ Jesus came to redeem the world. In this way, all Asian nations, whether they be Confucianist, Buddhist or Hindu, whether communist, democratic or autocratic, can interpret their histories and see their cultures and religions in terms of God’s redemptive activity in the world. Song writes:

A transposition from the Israel-centered view of history to the view that regards other nations as constructive parts of God’s design of history is required for a more realistic perception of God’s work in the world. Such new theology of history contains a tacit admission that Israel alone cannot explain world history. 116

To do this, Song goes directly to the Bible. In contrast to the Israel-centred Deuteronomistic theology (i.e. one centered on the historical books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings), Song is deeply moved by the global theology of Second Isaiah. 117 In the episode of God calling Cyrus, the

115 ibid., p. 16.
116 ibid., p. 49.
117 ibid., pp. 47-50.
emperor of Persia, for the execution of God's purpose in the world (Isa. 48: 15), Song sees a decisive theological breakthrough. He says,

The relation between God and Cyrus is a far more fundamental kind - it is a relationship of love. It is the intimate bond of love that ties Cyrus to God. It is no easy thing for the Jews in the Diaspora to accept this fact into their faith and theology, but they must try. In Cyrus God has shown them another centre where people become closely related to God. There will be yet other centres. Their one-centre theology must become a multi-centre theology. Their one-way system of faith is faced with the possibility of a multi-way system of faith. Second Isaiah proves to be a daring pioneer of faith whose vision of God at work in history is enriched and enlarged by a pagan king whom he calls God's loved one.118

Song asserts that it was "a very big blunder" when theologians "forced God's redemption into the history of a nation and of the Christian Church."119 God's redemptive activity is not confined to any fixed centre. The incarnation of God in the human person called Jesus means that God's work for the salvation of humanity is carried out in creation. Redemption can therefore be appropriated and experienced by all peoples at all times and in all places. Similarly, theological expression of that salvation can therefore be carried out in many centres. Song's Theology from the Womb of Asia is an example of "multi-centre theology."

Behind such theological assertion is Song's deep commitment to the salvation of Asian humanity. He writes:

118 ibid., p. 64.

As we plunge more deeply into the spirit, the heart, and soul of our Asian humanity embodied in religions, cultures, and histories outside the sphere of Christian influence, do we not have to rethink radically the Christian doctrine of election?  

Song's transpositional theology is indeed a radical rethinking of the doctrine of election. Using the principle of discontinuity ("disruption-dispersion") to interpret the Bible, Song reaches the conclusion that Asian religions and historical traditions can be seen alongside those of Israel so that these too may be interpreted as valid salvation histories, and he rejects the assumption that salvation comes to Asia insofar as it agrees to fall in with one particular stream of salvation history represented by the history of Israel and the Church.  

(b) Creation & Redemption  

Now in order to make this transposition, Song appeals to creation as the theological framework within which redemption is to be understood, thus denying the connection usually advocated in theology between election and redemption. "Redemption should not be institutionalized within a framework of election theology but should be seen against the background of creation." What is meant by creation? redemption?  

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120 TWA, p. 60.  
121 TCG, pp. 21-83.  
For Song, creation is the continuing act of God for the salvation of humankind. It deals with the redemptive response of God to the needs and problems of human beings. Thus creation has to do with the ways in which God deals with the world and humanity. The most concrete expression of this divine activity is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. He is the embodiment of God's love for the world.

Redemption on the other hand is the divine act which brings about the fulfilment of the basic human need of being in right relations with God and fellow human beings. It is the creation by God of a new possibility by which humanity, in its own terms, can respond to God's saving purpose for the world. Jesus Christ is that possibility. He is the new being, the embodiment of new God-human relationships and the revolutionary act of God which brings forth a new creation and a new humanity. In short, Jesus Christ is redemption.

By virtue of the fact that God's becoming human in Jesus Christ amounts to the creation of something new, Song comes to the view that creation and redemption (incarnation) ought to be seen in relation to each other. The two are not to be regarded as separate entities but "two moments of one and the same act of God." Because both God's creative and redemptive work in the world finds focus in the person and life of Jesus Christ the incarnate Word, Song sees in these two concepts the possibility of relating God's incarnate love in Christ to the context of Asian humanity. Creation and

\[123\] For Song, creation and incarnation (redemption) are inseparable. They are two sides of the coin. See, CMR, p. 52.
redemption serve as the key to an explanation of God's salvation in Christ, the Incarnate Word.\textsuperscript{124}

In a reply to responses made by D. Preman Niles and Charles C. West to his thought, Song has this to say, "Creation in redemption and redemption in creation—these are the key concepts that enable me to see cultures and religions in a positive as well as a negative light."\textsuperscript{125} Incarnation, expressed in terms of creation and redemption is, to Song, the point of entry into a new understanding of cultures, religions and histories, particularly those histories on which the Judeo-Christian traditions have not made a major impact. Creation must serve as the framework within which redemption, focused on the incarnation, is to be understood.

Now with regard to the question of the relation of the story of Israel to Asian people, his answer is that Israel was not to be the nation through which God's redeeming love would be mediated, but to be "a symbol of how God would deal redemptively also with other nations". That is to say, the history of Israel experienced and interpreted redemptively provides an example by which other nations may scrutinize their history for its redemptive quality and meaning. In this way, Israel is "symbolically transported out of its original context to a foreign context."\textsuperscript{126} For Song, there is no reason why there may not be many salvation histories and why

\textsuperscript{124} D. P. Niles & C. C. West, "Reviewing and Responding to the Thought of Choan Seng Song," p. 10.

\textsuperscript{125} ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{126} From Israel to Asia — A Theological Leap," Ecumenical Review, Vol. 28, no. 3 (July 1976), p. 258.
God may not work through other cultures even as God did in the culture and history of Israel. God would deal with China thus since God has dealt with Israel thus. This is what he means by a "theological leap" in the title of the essay just quoted. This also is where Song's radical contextualization (incarnation, indigenization) of theology begins.


As suggested by Song, theological activity consists in reflecting upon the present in the light of the redemption wrought by God in Jesus Christ. The two areas which the theologian must understand and interpret therefore are the life-experience of a people and the Judeo-Christian revelation. This requires some preparatory activities to equip the theologian for his/her task. One indispensable activity is the serious study of the Bible.

(a) The Bible.

For Song, the basic tool for the task of the theologian is the Bible; not just the New Testament as many Christians tend to think, but the whole Bible. Song recognizes the importance of the Bible as the source of the Christian faith. It is where faith begins and ends. By virtue of that fact, it goes without saying that the establishment of a system of

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theology in a particular setting must begin with a fresh and first-hand study of the Bible. Concerned about the reconstruction of theology in Asia and the apparent loss of interest in the biblical field of Chinese theology students, Song offers this reminder, "As to the building of an indigenous theology, we are not very realistic if we refuse to go back to the Bible and listen for ourselves to what God speaks to us." His advice is, "We must learn to listen to God's calling through the Bible at first-hand. ... we must become 'second-hand disciples'."

Biblical study is seen as the primary step toward the reconstruction of theology in Asia. He believes that through a first-hand wrestling with the biblical message, Asians would be able to relate directly to the redemption of God. They would be able to see how God is redemptively involved in the life of all humanity.

Song's own work demonstrates quite clearly that his theological insights are drawn largely from his interpretation of the biblical material. As we have pointed out in relation to the incarnational framework within which Song sees the connection between God's salvation and Asian peoples, it is his interpretation of the biblical story that leads him to this conclusion. According to Song, the biblical witness attests that redemption and creation are intricately linked concepts. "Redemption is seen in the perspective of creation,"

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128 "The Obedience of Theology in Asia," p. 11.
he writes. Then again, "Where there is creation, there is redemption. Conversely where there is redemption, there is creation."

In the account of creation for instance, (Gen. 1: 1-2: 4a), creation is understood in terms of an encounter between God and the power of evil, darkness and death. Confusion, chaos and devastation (tohu wa-bohu), and darkness pose an immediate threat to life and humanity. This grieves Gods' heart; and out of God's heartache flows creative acts of love which turn chaos to order. In other words, God's heartache compels God to redeem the suffering world and to create it anew. Creation therefore is really not so much a demonstration of God's glory as a manifestation of God's love and compassion. Creation speaks about God's redemptive response to the pain and suffering of the world. It is thus the disclosure of God's heart confronted with the power which tries to negate human life. It is the outpouring of God's heart; the staking of all that God is in the involvement with the hostile elements of this world.

Drawing on examples from the writings, prophetic books, gospels and Pauline letters, Song demonstrates that the biblical faith on the whole exemplifies this meaning of creation very well. In fact it is this conception of creation which makes the biblical faith unique. "What distinguishes the biblical faith in the christian Bible from all other

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130 CMR, p. 21.
131 TET, p. 40.
132 ibid.,
faiths is the personal ways in which God responds to the fears and predicament of a human community."\textsuperscript{133} What the biblical writers are seeking to express in the theme of creation is God's redemptive response to the troubles and suffering of this world. That is, creation is the continuing act of God for the redemption of humankind. Creation expresses the joy of redemption from the tyranny of chaos. It tries to convey the exuberance of being which is set free from the sinister power of destruction.

This connection then leads Song to conclude that creation and redemption provide the theological framework for viewing those peoples outside the sphere of Christian influence. From the perspective of creation, all peoples are brought into the orbit of God's redemptive activity. The place of Israel (and the Christian Church) is thus among the nations, only as a symbol, not as a custodian of God's salvation. This is highlighted especially by Second Isaiah in the Servant Songs\textsuperscript{134} and in the book of Jonah.\textsuperscript{135} In both stories, Song concludes that redemption is seen not as a right of a privileged people or culture but a gift of God for all peoples and all nations.

\textsuperscript{133} ibid., p. 37.
\textsuperscript{134} CMR, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{135} "God's Mission with the Nations," p. 229f.
(b) Constructive Imagination.

While it is essential for Asian theologians to take the Bible as the principal tool for theological reflection, biblical study is not an end in itself. Study of the Bible must be related to the 'sitz im leben' (context) of the interpreter because it is out of the encounter of Asian understanding of the Divine message in the Bible and their own living situations that a distinctively Asian theology would emerge. Such a theology would be distinctive - in comparison to Western theology - in terms of the forms in which the same substance of the Gospel is presented as well as the insights it gives into the actual working out of God's saving plan for the Asian peoples.136

In reporting on the inauguration of the Programme for theology and culture in Asia (PTCA), Song states:

The theology to be worked out has to be freshly new. It is a theology not dictated by western theology but by what has been disclosed and yet to be disclosed in the Bible, by lived and living experiences of peoples and nations of Asia.137

The last sentence gives an indication of what Song means by 'context.' It is the living, concrete situations where Asian peoples live out their daily lives as human beings and struggle with others to be human.138 This 'living' context, including religions, histories, cultures, traditions is what the theologian has to interpret.

136 "The Obedience of Theology in Asia," p. 15.

137 "A Theological Community with a Cutting Edge," p. 90.

138 TWA, p. 81, 86.
An important tool Song suggests for this activity is what he calls "third-eye." This is described as "a power of perception and insight that enables ... to grasp the meaning under the surface of things and phenomena." For Song a theologian has to be more like a poet than a philosopher, because a poet has this third-dimensional insight into reality. Because only poets can weave together God's story and human story. "To be a scientific theologian is not enough. One has to be a poetic theologian." What is most needed is theological imagination, in order that the symbols of Asian suffering and spirituality may be decoded and understood.

Asian theologians must especially be able to "image" their theology, not conceptualize it as done in the past. The reason why this way of theologizing is most commendable is because they live in cultures shaped largely by the power of imaging, not by the capacity to conceptualize. Unfortunately, Song claims, a culture created in the West by the power of abstraction has taken control of the Asian theological mind. Thus "to regain our ability to image theology as a poet images poetry and a painter images painting is fundamental to theological efforts in Asia." Nobody could doubt that this enriches greatly the task of theologizing in every "province." But I am not so sure that conceptual thought simply falls away in the presence of an "imaging" theology. An image is, after all, an invitation to thought.

139 TET, p. xi.
141 ibid., p. 61.
According to Song, the imago dei provides the biblical and theological basis for the imaging of theology. God images the human being out of God's own self. By imaging God's own self in humankind, God imparts the ability to image all created things in relation to God. Thus God has endowed us with the power of theological imaging.\textsuperscript{142}

(c) Passion (Heart).

Closely associated with the last point is his third tool for theological reflection. For theologians to engage in the task of theological imaging, they must have passion, that is, strong love and suffering.\textsuperscript{143} Song writes,

Passion is full-hearted love because it goes out of itself and enters into others. There passion as love becomes suffering, for in the others you encounter sickness and death. In them you are faced with poverty and oppression. And in them you perceive the struggle of the soul in a world of transience and finitude. In others you do not enter a paradise but a sea of bitterness.\textsuperscript{144}

Passion as love for others becomes passion as suffering for them. And if no transformation of love to suffering takes place, then one's love for others is not genuine love; it is not a "full-hearted love but half-hearted love."\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} ibid., p. 64.

\textsuperscript{143} The biblical concept for it is 'hesed' in Hebrew and 'agape' in Greek (= long-suffering, self-giving and sacrificial love). The texts that Song uses to illustrate this nature and quality of passion is Hosea 11 and 1 Corinthians 13.

\textsuperscript{144} ibid., p. 111.

\textsuperscript{145} ibid.,
In suggesting passion (love) as a tool for theological reflection, Song is emphasizing an important dimension that is inadequately expressed in traditional theology. For a long time, the theologizing process has been exclusively cognitive and cerebral — an act of the intellect divorced from the commitment of the heart. It has been a theology of the head only, without the heart, mouth, hands and feet. In that respect, it has been a "lifeless" theology. Yet theology really begins in the heart of God. Theology essentially has to do with God’s passion and loving commitment to human beings. "Theology is not debate," Song writes. "It is not argumentation. It is not reasoning. Theology is confession. It is a witness to the truth wherever it manifests itself." But what truth? The truth that God so loved the world that God took human form in Jesus Christ in order that the world may be redeemed to God. Song understands the God revealed in Jesus Christ essentially in terms of love and compassion. This compassionate God is both creator and redeemer. God’s incarnate Love in Jesus creates, redeems and recreates human beings and human communities. Song again writes,

God is not a concept. God is not an idea. God is not a norm or a category. Nor is God a principle. God is love. And love is act. It is a power. Love is a power that works redemption in the life of women, men and children, in the history of their community and their nations.  

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146 TUN, p. 37f.
147 TWA, p. 132.
In other words, theology is about relationships between God and humanity and between human beings and other human beings. Its business is to discern and witness to the love of God at work in this world of severed and wounded human relationships.

Precisely for these reasons, it is important to include in the discourse about God the dimensions of the affective and volitional. That is, theologians must be guided by passion in their theological reflections. This does not mean to play down the important role of reason in theological reflection. But it does mean that while both have important functions, passion is prevenient to reason. The former directs and controls the latter. "What governs us in theology must be first passion and then logic; we should theologise first with the heart and only then with the brain."149 For Song, it is the heart which makes us realize that God and human beings are joined together in loving and suffering. This passionate heart must therefore be used a lot more than it is in the service of theology.

149 TWA, p. 116.
What is the mission of the Church? This is the focus of our enquiry in this chapter. Before we deal with that question, let us recapitulate on some of the main points made previously that would shed more light on Song’s understanding of mission.

A. The Incarnate Word as Being and Act of God.

Jesus Christ the incarnate Word of God as we have shown is the centre of Song’s theology. There are reasons for this christological focus. One involves the challenges posed by Asian religious thinkers on the meaning of Jesus Christ. Thus Song finds it imperative to discover the "rightful role of Christology in the Christian encounter with religions of the East." Another is the unfortunate reality, according to Song’s observation, that christological formulations have traditionally been so Western that Christ is often rejected

1 Song works through his Christology continually by reference to the Asian religions with which he is in contact. He finds that they, in trying to apprehend the meaning of Jesus Christ, separate His work from His person. See especially: "The Role of Christology in the Christian Encounter with Eastern Religions," SEAJT, Vol. 5, no. 3 (January 1964), p. 26f; and "An Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Culture and its Implications for the Task of Theology," SEAJT, Vol. 4, no. 4 ((April 1963), pp. 9-25. This is especially true of Hindu thinkers who have relativised the historical Jesus if not also the divine Christ (see n. 11 on Radhakrisnan, in "The Role of Christology in the Christian Encounter with Eastern Religions," p. 18 ). The main problem for the Hindu is "how the universal can break into history and dwell in the midst of other particulars, without being caught in the evil net of 'samsara'" (cycle of rebirth). ibid., p. 19.
by Asians along with outmoded Western culture. Thus, "how should we as Christians reappropriate faith in Jesus Christ in this culturally, religiously, and socio-politically pluralistic and divisive world?" This is the fundamental question in this effort of Song's at reconstructing Christian mission. The answer is found in the 'Word becoming flesh.'

The Word is not an abstraction but is part of the very being of God. The incarnation means that God has come to dwell among human beings in the man Jesus. Jesus Christ is thus God in human form; the enfleshment and humanisation of God. Jesus shows us the compassionate God who loves and suffers so that humanity may be recreated and redeemed. He is the embodiment of God's redemptive love for the world. In Jesus we see the unity of God's act and being. Like Barth, Song emphasizes that a sound view of Jesus Christ must combine "Being and Act."²

Recognizing that it is precisely the separation of the work of Jesus Christ from His person which causes one of the basic christological errors in the East, Song suggests that the unity of Jesus' act and being must be stressed again and again. This is why his first christological principle is - "Being and Act in the communion of incarnating Love."³ To view Jesus' person and work in isolation as many theologians have done since the 19th century only makes a caricature of Jesus. The Biblical witness attests that all of Jesus' actions spring out or correspond directly to His very Being which is the

incarnate love of God made flesh and dwelling among humankind for their redemption and reconciliation. Thus Song asserts that only such an understanding of God's action in Christ can play a constructive role "in the midst of religions in which salvation is regarded as either an attainment of the timeless Nirvana or as perfection of man's moral nature which is the Tao."

B. Existence not Essence.

The incarnation provides a good theological foundation for a truly Asian theology. It provides a perspective for seeing God at work among the history of people with little association with Christianity. By virtue of the Word becoming flesh, a break from the past and traditional way of doing theology is necessary. Rather than being concerned with the "essence" of God (which has been characteristic of Western theology) an Asian theology must be concerned with the "existence" (incarnation) of God in Asian humanity. Instead of a theology of essence which concentrates on the question of what God is, Asian theology must be a "theology of existence", that is, a theology which seeks to come to grips with "what God does" in Asia today.

To do this entails beginning from the perspective of the "present moment" of human existence. After all, the incarnate

*ibid.*, p. 27.
Word is eternally "present" with the world. The incarnation occurs whenever God enters the life of humankind in particular historical and cultural contexts. Now since the Word has become incarnate in the Asian context, the task of Asian theologians is therefore to reflect on God's mission of creation and redemption (incarnation) in present Asia. Where is God among the Asian masses? What is God doing in the face of aggressive communist ideology, desperate poverty, suffering and continuing religious search for the ultimate destiny of humankind? The ultimate goal of this theological activity is to bring into light, in the course of the explanation of the Christian faith, how the creative power of God's saving love is at work even in the darkest corner of Asia. How this redemptive power of God's love is working among human communities to recover the meaning of "being", thus giving meaning to the "past" and creating hope for the future.

C. God and the World.

Such a theology as Song advocates drives the church beyond itself into the world. From the perspective of the incarnation, Song postulates two primary determinants for theology. These are God and the world. In taking the Incarnation and the prologue to John's gospel seriously, he sees the ministry of Jesus Christ as his "home coming." The Son of God, in coming to God's world, is coming to his

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Father's home. He is rejected by those who had usurped his own Father's world. Yet the whole purpose of his coming is to serve God's world and God's people even though both are sin-infested.\(^6\)

Truly, it is in this world that the Church lives, moves and has its being, and it is in certain places in this world that the Church - those people confessing the name of Christ - is gathered. Thus the whole world (creation) is the frame of the Church. And since the Church has no \textit{lebensraum} apart from this world which is God's, church and world cannot be separated. With this perspective, he argues against those who wish to speak of "Church-world dialogue" and those accepting the doctrine of Cyprian, that of "no salvation outside the Church."\(^7\) With this perspective also, he sees the mission of the Church as consisting in the breaking up of man's colonies; and in the restoration of God's territory (world) and God's people.\(^9\)


D. Mission of Incarnation.

1. The Word has to assume Asian Flesh.

For Song, if the incarnation is taken seriously, then inevitably, the world (creation) and not the Church becomes the theological arena of God's activity for the salvation of humankind. Thus, "one cannot assume the church as the base of theology - as western theology does - when one is doing theology in a multi-religious context or in the context of a political ideology which offers an alternative way of salvation." 10 In other words, it is not in church but in "the Word that has assumed Asian flesh" that Asians find their salvation. The following paragraph points us directly to the heart of Song's theological convictions.

In the final analysis, the Word has to assume Asian flesh and plunge into the agony and conflict of the mission of salvation in Asia. This flesh will be broken as it was broken on the cross. But when this Asian flesh assumed by the Word is broken, the saving and healing power of God will be released into the struggle of men and women for meaning, hope and life. 11

Obviously, what Song is emphasizing here is the mission of the Church which he sees to consist in the incarnation of the Word in the flesh and blood of Asian humanity. If the Gospel of the love of God in Christ is to become a redemptive force by recovering the meaning of being human in Asia, if it is to be a source of healing and a fountain of hope for

10 "From Israel to Asia - A Theological Leap," Mission Trends No. 3, p. 220.

11 ibid., p. 222.
meaningful existence in the Asian situation, then Christians must seek to incarnate the Word in the Asian context of human life. How? By following, both in mission and theology, in deed and word, God's mission of incarnation.

As we have pointed out before, the essence of God's mission of salvation is the incarnation, the meaning of which consists basically in God's affirmation of the world/humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, humanity is able to see the incarnation of God's mission. Christian mission must then take on the nature and task of God's mission of salvation because this is precisely what the Church is called to be. For the church to be church, she has to be truly 'missionary.' This means that "the church lives for mission, subsists in mission, and derives her strength from mission." In Song's view, mission constitutes the ontological ground of being the church. Mission is the "heart" of the Church. When mission stops, the church dies. And whoever treats mission casually is taking life out of the church casually. However, the Church must remember that she has no separate mission apart from that of Jesus Christ, who is the

12 "In Jesus Christ we are confronted with the God who knows man's ontological dependence on Him and his existential alienation from Him. He thus comes in Christ to be one with man, accepting the latter's sinfuless, claiming him back to Him. This is the mystery of the grace and love of the incarnation ... When we say God accepts man, surely we mean He accepts man in his totality. God did not become one with an abstract man, a man divorced from his context, separated from his flesh and blood." C. S. Song, "Wither Protestantism in Asia Today," SEAJT, Vol. 11 (Spring 1970), p. 74.

incarnation of God's mission of salvation for the world. What is the nature and task of God's mission that the Church has to embody?

The answer is found in how Jesus worked out the mission of God. In an article, "Election for Mission," Song sees that Christ is elected to God's mission and that conformation to this mission was through the mode of servanthood. The mode of servanthood as demonstrated by Christ has three important aspects which the Christian Church is required to emulate in her mission.


The first aspect is "self-emptying." (Philippians 2: 5-11). Christ's mission is one of total self-emptying. He emptied himself and made himself nothing once and for all. He voluntarily renounced all that He was, and enslaved himself in God's service, by becoming a servant of God's mission of saving the world. But in emptying himself completely, and becoming a slave to God's service, Jesus Christ showed us the beginning of a new being and new relationships. Song writes:

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14 Election for Song is 'being chosen' by God, (and for us, by Christ) to carry out God's will. There are two aspects of this election. The first is that each person has no say in the choice by God, and the second is that they, once chosen, are chosen to be the servants of God in the world. See, C. S. Song, "Election for Mission," SEAJT, Vol. 13, no. 2 (1972), pp. 40-48.
The act of self-emptying marks a beginning of a new form of being and a new set of relationships. After putting away all that separates Him from all human beings, He assumes a new form of being, the form of a servant, literally a slave.\textsuperscript{15}

Mission of self-emptying thus is a mission of service to God and humankind.

Furthermore, the mission of self-emptying starts at a point of weakness rather than strength, of poverty rather than richness, of debasement rather than exaltation. If this is where Christ began his mission, then it means that here too is where the Christian mission to the world must begin. It means, for one thing, that Christian mission must force itself to stare at its own weakness and nakedness in the world, especially following the wake of the force of secularization.\textsuperscript{16} For another, it means that Christian mission in the particular context of Asia, must begin by accepting Asians as they are and with all they have.

This acceptance must be an unconditional "Yes" to Asian persons with their religious aspirations and cultural backgrounds. Song asserts that if the Christian faith has meaning at all to the Asians, Christians must, in the practice of their missionary calling, try to empty themselves of preconceptions and prejudices against others who belong to

\textsuperscript{15} "Election for Mission," p. 41.

\textsuperscript{16} Secularization among other things, for example, socio-political revolutions, has resulted in the wearing away of power from the Church. It no longer makes history, in the way it did from the Constantinian settlement until the last two centuries. Yet the Church continues with its ecclesiastical imperialism despite the fact that the reality of the world tells the Church that no matter how hard we try, with the passing of each moment we are further from the goal of Christianizing the world.
another religion. Instead of just asking others to come to church, "the church must, through Christians, go to them participating in their religious services, festival, cultural activities ..." Such "Christian presence" is a symbol of the Christ's mission of self-emptying, because it conveys the message that God accepts them (Asians) just as much as God does Christians.17 So Christian mission must begin with a similar act of self-emptying so as to receive and communicate afresh God's message to a world where God has sided with those who are poor, oppressed and down-trodden; and to a world characterized by pluralisms of all sorts.

3. Self-Denial or Readiness for Others.

The second aspect of Christ's mission of servanthood is the "readiness for others." This is implicit in the following statement:

When one empties oneself and makes oneself nothing one gives up one's being totally. ... One faces other human beings without precondition, reservation, claim, not to say self-assertion. ... There is nothing in and around me to separate myself from you. My religion, my culture, my national loyalty I leave behind in order to become involved in you as a fellow human being with basic common spiritual agonies and aspirations.18

For Song, the act of self-emptying creates the possibility of readiness of others. Rightly so, it is when one empties oneself completely that one becomes totally open to others.

18 ibid., p. 75.
Christ's readiness for others is demonstrated through the parable of the foot-washing, a prophetic act. As Song explains, self-emptying is a form of self-denial; it is a willingness to make oneself nothing. Self-denial is common Buddhist practice based on the understanding of the 'self' as the source of all evil and illusion. But whilst the Buddhist believer tends to equate self-denial with the extinction of the self, Song sees self-denial in terms of self-emptiness. In the act of self-emptying Jesus was able to face others "without precondition, reservation, claim or self-assertion." Song terms this as being authentic to the self, so that no illusion (or evil) exists within the self.

In being so, Jesus was ready for others, to serve them and their needs. The foot-washing showed the symbolic act of the Son of man, pouring out his being for the world, for the sin of humanity, and this is the readiness of the servant. Foot-washing, though, remains a reality as well as a parabolic act. For the Christian engaged in mission, it is the means through which one becomes a son of God in Jesus Christ. "Only when you really feel the weight of the burden of being a servant of the Servant Lord you begin to know what it cost Christ to give his life as a ransom for many." This leads to the third aspect of Jesus' election to servanthood, namely, "mission of healing."

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20 ibid., p. 43.

The faith of Israel had seen the possibility expressed in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah. The election of this person to be the servant of the Lord had its reason and purpose in the healing of the nations, one standing for many. Here Song is working from what he sees as the biblical understanding that all creatures are one both spiritually and materially, and this has its consequences for the understanding of creation and salvation.

Song speaks here of the "totalitarianism of God's grace," the love that will not let go, no matter how hard one tries to disown God. Through the incarnation, God has taken into Godself humanity so that to speak of Christ is to speak of the world; so that the Church must participate in the mission of healing, and does so when she confesses her solidarity with the world.

The Church is already engaged in the mission of healing when she confesses her part in human tragedies, acknowledges her responsibility in face of the forces of destruction that threaten life, and admits her share in knowingly and unknowingly having to do with socio-economic injustices in the present world.21

However, by being engaged in the mission of healing, which was manifest in Jesus, we find that God has invested the hope for the future of humanity on those elected to be his servants. The Christian community must therefore be the source for the healing of the world.

21 ibid., p. 44.
Healing implies hope for the future. If there were no hope then healing would be pointless, and it is at this point that the Church is called to take over Christ's mission. Essentially, we are a people of hope in God. Hope is of the very essence of humankind, because it is what gives meaning to life. Christian hope is based on the confession that God is love and this is primarily focussed on the Cross and the resurrection. The Cross shows to humankind the reality of God's love, but it is not the end of it all, for it is followed by the resurrection. The resurrection is the victory of God's love and because it is, it is also God's future of the world. For this to have happened, we must realize that God suffered.

You can suffer genuinely and redemptively only in so far as you are helplessly in love with someone. God is such a helpless lover. He is in love with us, man and the world, that he cannot but suffer. And because God is such a helpless lover, we are given hope and future. Hope is thus in the act of loving, giving and suffering.22

Hope, however, makes demands upon Christians. Christians are to be always ready for a new start, and secondly, they are to be optimists. The Bible is witness to the reason for both of these facets. God’s love for Israel always gave them the hope of a new start, after some national catastrophe. Israel in exile, were given a new start, whether we feel it was deserved or not. Also, God has been the optimist before us. It was God who affirmed the goodness of creation after making it out of chaos and disorder. It was God who sent His Son into

22 ibid., p. 46.
the world, because God loved it.\textsuperscript{23}

Our hope in God's act of love means we are not to lose hope in others or ourselves. Thus we have to be oriented in love not only to God, but to the world which God has made and does love. As God has been patient with us, even when it led Jesus to the Cross, so then we must be patient with others who are different religiously, culturally and ideologically. Christians, though, have been chosen for hope, of which the ultimate fulfilment is in God's hands. The Christian community must be a community of hope in the world showing forth the symbol and reality of hope which is found in love.

It is when the church becomes a community of love that she becomes a community of hope on behalf of the world. ... The primary mission of a Christian community in a particular place is to become a community of hope on behalf of the world. ... When they are able to manifest joy, peace and justice as a community of love, there is hope for the world, in spite of everything.\textsuperscript{24}

In the particular context of Asia, Song is confident that the Church can work towards the fulfilment of God's mission of salvation by being open to the world (self-emptying), by being ready to accept others both in love and in judgement, and by being a sign of hope for fallen humanity.

For the Word to become incarnate in the humanity and world of Asia, the Word has to "assume Asian flesh." This means that the Church in Asia must seek to become a symbol and witness to the living God who is eternally present in the world. It means that the Church has the responsibility of

\textsuperscript{23} ibid.,

\textsuperscript{24} ibid., p. 48.
making her whole life a manifestation of the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ. And how can the Church do this? By learning to love things Asian through Jesus Christ. This, according to Song, is self-evident because one cannot live for others unless one truly loves them. To live for others often means suffering and sacrifice. For, can one really suffer and make sacrifices for others unless one loves them?"
CHAPTER 13: HISTORY AS THE CONTINUATION OF GOD’S CREATION.

History is an important theme in virtually all of Song’s major writings. It is central to his overall programme. What follows therefore is an examination of Song’s view of history and how it relates to the goal of his theological endeavours, namely, reconstructing Christian theology in Asia. At the same time, we shall seek to discern traces of indigenization in his theology of history.

A. Critique of Traditional View of History.

Song’s interest in history stems primarily from the need to address the question of how people brought up in lands with little or no Christian influence are related to salvation wrought by God in Christ.\(^1\) In his observation, traditional Christian theology of history, as reflected in the practice of Christian mission during the past century, has not been able to deal adequately with the reality of historical pluralism as well as secularization. Typically, Christian theology has by and large tended to view non-Christian histories in separation from God’s creation. Christ becomes encapsulated in one particular historical framework to the exclusion of all others. Summed up in the concept of Heilsgeschichte, the Christian view of history has emphasized

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\(^1\) Does the redemptive love of God in Christ have anything to do with China? Is there an intrinsic connection between the salvation of God in Christ and Buddhist, Confucianist, or Hindu Asia?
the continuity of God's salvation from Israel to the Christian Church.² Israel and the church form one continuous history representing God's plan of salvation.

A direct corollary of this position is that all other histories are unrelated to God's salvation until they come into the orbit of the 'christian' faith. Or, theological understanding of history can only be obtained from a Christian standpoint. Simply put, Song reflects,

we Christians think of history generally in terms of a forward movement with the realization of the kingdom of God as its ultimate goal. History is meaningful insofar as it conforms to our vision of the kingdom of God.³

In other words, the histories of countries like Communist China, Hindu India, or Buddhist Cambodia, to mention only a few, have no real meaning of their own in relation to the Christian God by virtue of the fact that they fall outside the sphere of the history of salvation represented by Israel and

² The concept of Heilgeschichte (salvation history) was made prominent by J. C. von Hofmann and the Erlanger School which deeply influenced pietism in 19th century Germany. In this century, wide theological use of the concept was revived by the New Testament scholar, Oscar Cullmann. The view presented in his Christ and Time (1964) is typical of traditional christian perception of God's work of salvation where history is seen as a linear movement from Creation and Fall to a triumphant, restitutionary conclusion which lies outside the temporal sequence in a community of resurrected believers united in the faith of Christ. Cullmann identifies what he calls "redemptive history" as a "slender line" (the Christ line) between the old creation and the new creation with Christ at the mid-point, under the principle of "progressive reduction and progressive advance" (p. 177). Cullmann claims that there is a difference between the narrower redemptive history as it unfolds in the church and the universal process (p. 179). But how redemptive history and universal history are related, he does not seem to say.

³ C. S. Song, "New Frontiers of Theology in Asia - Ten Theological Theses," SEAJT, Vol. 20, no. 1 (1979), p. 17. This article is reprinted as chapter 1 of TUN.
the Christian Church.

Song is critical of this theological position for several reasons. Firstly, this interpretation of history amounts to what he calls 'spiritual imperialism.' It presupposes that Christians have monopoly on the truth about God and that all other spiritual quests for truth are misguided and perverted. Such a view tends to encapsulate God and confine divine action to one fixed centre, namely, the history of Israel and Christianity. It suggests that the Judeo-Christian tradition of faith can contain God and arrest God's movement, something that Song believes no religious system, however profound, can do.

Secondly, the principles of "election and representation" which underlie this interpretation of history and which Oscar Cullmann, to whom we have referred, espouses, have been the two solid pillars supporting the claims of Christianity to uniqueness among other faiths and religions. And it is these claims that have contributed largely to the failure of Christian mission in Asia.

Thirdly, once human history is telescoped into Israel and the Church, nations and peoples who are not directly related to the Judeo-Christian history are left out as if they have no place in God's redemptive work in Christ. Regarded as being 'godless,' they lose their distinctiveness and meaningfulness. But no understanding of history, Song argues, not even Christian theology of history, can do justice to world history

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by not taking into account these non-Judeo-Christian histories and peoples. It is for this precise reason that the Christian view of history has sometimes been seen to be an "incommunicable kind of theology."^5

Finally, such an understanding of history does not tally with the witness of Bible. For, presupposed in such "straight-line theology" of history is a "straight-line God" who has predetermined who are to be saved and who are to be condemned.^6 Such straight-line theology implies that God does not deal directly with non-Christian nations. Divine activity for the salvation of humanity does not take place in countries brought up in non-christian traditions. God cannot be directly encountered in the histories of non-christian nations. Hence it follows that the Christian God cannot be the God of the Communist Chinese or the Buddhist Vietnamese until they are drawn into the sphere of salvation history represented by Israel and the Christian Church.

Song argues that the God portrayed in the Bible is a universal God. For example, the question of "theodicy" which the prophets wrestled with eventually led them to the conclusion that the God of Israel was also the God of the 'nations.' Persians and Babylonians were all included in God's scheme of salvation. Hence, Second Isaiah saw it fitting to

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^5 Christopher Dawson quoted by Song in "The Divine Mission of Creation," p. 310; According to Song, if a non-Christian finds it difficult to understand the Christian view of history, how much more would it be to understand the Christian faith in the God incarnate in Jesus Christ?

^6 TCG, p. 25.
call King Cyrus, "God's shepherd," \(^7\) "God's anointed"\(^8\) and Jeremiah described Nebuchadnezzar as "God's servant."\(^9\) God's sovereignty is seen to encompass the whole of creation. Thus the God of the Bible is as much the God of the Israelites and the Christians as the Confucianists and Buddhists. Moreover, there is no boundary to God's work of salvation. The God who acted in the history of Israel and the Christian nations has been, is and always will be active also in the histories of non-Christian nations.

Convinced of the inadequacy of the salvation-history model, Song is led to conclude that the reconstruction of theology in Asia calls for theological perspectives that are radically different from those to which we have been accustomed.\(^{10}\) He proposes that the incarnation, expressed in terms of creation and redemption, gives a much more adequate perspective for explaining how God deals with the "nations." From the perspective of incarnation, the process of history can no longer be seen to be essentially unrelated to God's creation at the beginning of time. Rather all histories become the "continuation of the work of creation."\(^{11}\)

\(^7\) Isaiah 44: 28.

\(^8\) Isaiah 45: 1.

\(^9\) Isaiah 27: 5-6.

\(^{10}\) Song is referring here to those theological categories (such as election, representation, predestination, etc.) that divide revelation into general and special, that regard the salvation of the world as the same thing as evangelization of the world, or that neatly classify people into the godly or the ungodly. See, "New Frontiers of Theology Asia - Ten Theological Theses," p. 18.

\(^{11}\) CMR, pp. 30-35.
In adopting the incarnational model for interpreting the meaning of history, Song advocates a new principle of interpretation, namely, discontinuity or disruption. For him, the great disruption caused by Jesus’ death and resurrection should lead to a radical reorientation in the thinking of the church concerning God’s engagement with the world. He writes,

The decisive factor in a theology of history from the Christian point of view is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, as the Word become flesh, is the theological centre which guides our theological reflection and action in Asian settings. For in Jesus Christ God engaged himself in theological action with humanity.

Thus in Song’s theological reflections, the event of the incarnation is the focal point through which the meaning of creation can be understood and interpreted. From an

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12 In his reading of the Bible, Song finds that those events and experiences which interrupt the normal course of life and history become the bearers of meaning which bring something qualitatively new into the realm of history. In the story of the Tower of Babel, for example, Song sees the disruption of the construction and the dispersion of the people not as punishment but as fulfilment of God’s purpose for the "development and progress of humanity." (TCG, p. 23). This pattern of disruption-dispersion is demonstrated throughout the history of Israel, in the uprooting of Abraham, Exodus, Exile etc. Each time, Song shows these disruptions to be in keeping with God’s redemptive plan for creation. In this respect, disruption-dispersion (discontinuity) liberates us from our one-dimensional, linear or straight-line understanding of history.

In the New Testament, God’s creating/redemptive act in history becomes most manifest in Jesus Christ. Jesus death on the cross is the greatest disruption in the history of Israel and the Church. Not only does the cross become a negation of Jewish messianism, it also becomes a negation of Christian messianism. That is to say, the cross negates the belief in Judeo-Christian history as the sole instrument of God’s saving work in the world. See, TCG, p. 90f; also, "From Israel to Asia—A Theological Leap," Ecumenical Review, p. 254.

incarnational perspective, Asian histories can be seen on an equal bar with those of Israel and nations nurtured in the christian tradition. He argues that when the event of Christ is divorced from the total process of creation, Christianity becomes armed with 'historical particularism' bent on claiming universal validity for its particular view on history. The incarnation therefore provides an adequate approach to the task of reconstructing an Asian Christian theology of history.

B. Theological Understanding of History.

What is history? History in its most far-reaching sense is the movement of the human spirit under the irresistible impact of the Spirit of God. History is the outcome of the interactions between the Spirit of God and the human spirit. It is the direct result of the action of God upon human beings. Quite clearly, the two principal actors that make up the play called history are, for Song, God and humanity. Without either one of them, there can be no such thing as history. Or rather, history is meaningless without the interaction of these two constituents.

14 CMR, p. 33.
15 TET, p. 1; also TCG, p. 28.
1. History and God.

Song's view is based on the biblical understanding, particularly the prophetic tradition where history is interpreted in terms of God's redemptive activity in and for the world. In the light of this prophetic insight, history is not just a human or natural phenomenon as science would say; it is also divine by virtue of God's active participation in it through Christ Jesus for the salvation of humanity. This is what Song means when he says that "history is the Word of God in action." It is the time and space of God's active involvement with the world and human beings.

The Christian affirmation of God as Creator means that it is in history that God's redeeming activity begun at creation is continued. It also means that all histories belong to God. History has no separate existence apart from God; it begins and ends in God. Since God encompasses the whole of history from beginning to end, obviously, the history of say, communist Russia is as much God's history as the history of Israel. The history of the "pagan" East is no less God's than the history of the "Christian" West. Moreover, all histories get linked up and become intelligible in the light

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17 CMR, p. 99.

18 TCG, p. 57.
of one another by God's creative activity in the world.

2. History and People.

In addition to the divine aspect, Song emphasises the human aspect of history. For him, history cannot be separated from 'flesh-and-blood' human beings. When we speak of history, we are actually speaking of people.\(^{19}\)

People are the flesh and blood of history. History begins when people begin. History collapses when people collapse. History dies when people die. This is true of all histories - the history of the Jewish people, the history of Christians, the history of Buddhists, and so on.\(^{20}\)

History therefore cannot be spoken of in an abstract sense. It is neither an idea nor an abstract concept. It is not just dates and places. It is essentially about persons. Persons are the content of history. Without persons, history becomes an abstraction. It is in this respect that Song speaks of history as "the story of how people live and die, love and hate, suffer and hope."\(^{21}\)

People also cannot be spoken about in general terms. Women, men and children live, move and have their being in specific socio-political and religio-cultural settings. They love, hate, suffer and hope in particular contexts. Likewise, history has to be the history of individuals as community or

\(^{19}\) ibid., p. 59.


a nation who find themselves on certain crossroads of time and space. History has to be spoken of in relation to its actual and tangible context. It has to be rooted in the soil of a nation and in the community of a people. History, after all, does not exist in a vacuum. History has to be the history of Indian people, history of China, history of Japan, etc. In this way, particularity is the main characteristic of history. It is within our own historical specificity that we encounter the God who is the Lord of history.

3. The Dynamics of History

God and human beings constitute history. Since these two constituents are living entities, Song takes history as a dynamic whole, a "living reality" moving from past to present to future. History therefore cannot be seen in terms of mere facts or mere chronology. It cannot be seen in terms of the past and nothing more, the past that one cannot do anything about. Rather, history is a "movement of life" — life emerging from the dark past, struggling to live the present

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22 C. S. Song, "Recovering Theological Meanings in our Histories," ATESEA Occasional Papers, No. 3: Doing Theology and People's Movements in Asia, (1987), p. 7. History without a context is no longer history. For history to be history, the lived experience of human beings in a particular context is of utmost importance. This experience has to be told, relived and interpreted.

23 It must be noted that in interpreting history in terms of people, Song attempts to emphasise the inclusion of Asian humanity in the salvation wrought by God in Christ Jesus.

and striving for fulfilment. It is "the pilgrimage of a person, the journey of a people, the vicissitudes of a nation." As such history is not finished at any point in time but is created and re-created.

Now since history is a living reality, Song suggests that it ought not to be memorized but to be interpreted, not to be remembered but to be understood.²⁵ By continually interpreting the movement of history, that is, the history of persons, its redemptive meaning may be grasped and appropriated for human existence. What does Song mean by this?

(a) The Meaningfulness of History.

Following the insight of Abraham Heschel regarding history as 'the realm of divine meaning,' Song takes history to be the time and space where human beings encounter God. And in that encounter, human beings derive the meaning of life itself. Touched by God, human beings become aware of what it means to be human in relation to the Creator and to fellow human beings. He writes,

History is the activity of the human spirit in search of its divine meaning. ... History is a human search of divine meaning for human existence. It is the realm where the divine and human meet to create order out of chaos, to make light shine in the darkness, and to fashion signs of eternity in the midst of transitoriness.²⁶

What is suggested by this statement is Song's conviction about the meaningfulness of history. The history of each nation is

²⁵ TWA, p. 20.

²⁶ "Liberation of People in History," p. 15.
the realm in which divine meaning is made known to human beings. But what and where this meaning shall be found in history is a question far short of any definitive answer. In considering this question, Th. Preiss concludes that "above all things," history has been something of a "mystery" in Christian theology. That is, the meaning of history is elusive and obscure. This is particularly true especially when human dreams are shattered, hopes are destroyed and promises unfulfilled. To millions of people who often find themselves in such situations, history is regarded negatively; in fact it becomes for them the realm of human meaninglessness.

Certainly Song is not unaware of this problem. As a matter of fact, it is precisely the recognition of this difficulty which is a motivating factor in his emphasis on history. Song is conscious of the grave reality of Asian life, with all its problems of suffering, injustices, poverty, hunger, despair and the like. He is aware that this reality has impressed upon many the view that life itself is meaningless. In addition to this, there is the reality of Hindu indifference towards historical questions. There is also the fatalistic tendency of many Asians derived mainly from the

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27 Th. Preiss, "The Vision of History in the N.T." in On the Meaning of History, (Geneva: Oikoumene, 1949), p. 66. The same view is shared by Roger L. Shinn when he points out that, "It has been more typical of Christian thought to say that nature or history, when viewed in themselves in the agonizing search for a rationale or meaning, drive the seeker to the edge of absurdity or despair." Christianity and the Problem of History, (New York: Abbot, 1964), p. 269.

Buddhist view of history as essentially suffering. These religious sentiments and attitudes have only served to consolidate a negative regard of history and encourage this feeling of meaninglessness. Yet, as Song is keen to emphasize, history cannot be said to be a haphazard thing. It is not without meaning. In Asia, there are "meanings of history" which can be appropriated for the benefit of human existence. Even suffering and pain that Asians experience has redemptive meaning.  

(b) Love as the Meaning of History.

What then is the meaning of history? The answer lies in the creative and redemptive acts of God for the world. Song says, "Creation and redemption and redemption in creation - this is the meaning of history." This means that the "intrinsic meaning of each historical entity" is rooted in the gracious and loving acts of the Creator and Redeemer God who became totally involved in the life of human beings in order to re-create human relationships and to liberate humanity from the powers that seek to enslave and destroy it. 

For Song, the God incarnate in Christ is essentially a compassionate God. "Love is everything that God is and does." Compassion constitutes the essence of God's being

29 TET, p. 54.
30 ibid., p. 58.
and act. Love causes God's heart to suffer ache and pain for people struggling against demonic powers in life and in history. The witness of the Bible clearly attests to this fact. The life and ministry of Jesus culminating on the cross brings God's love and pain to concrete manifestation. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God's redeeming love. In him, God as divine love and humanity as human love meet to create a new person oriented both to God and humanity. He is the love of the God-man in action.\textsuperscript{32}

The last sentence indicates that God's love in Song's view is both personal and active. It has power to effect results in the lives of people; to renew and create order out of meaninglessness, hope out of despair and life out of death. "Love is a power that works redemption in the life of women, men and children, in the history of their community and their nation."\textsuperscript{33} Thus, wherever love is manifested, whenever it is exercised in the histories of Asian humanity, it generates a theological force which makes life meaningful and worth living. It is in this sense that Song underlines that "history is the creation of the power that brings the past into the present and the present into the future" recognizing God's love as the power of history.\textsuperscript{34}

Under the profound impact of Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God's redemptive love in action, history is

\textsuperscript{32} ibid., p. 78.

\textsuperscript{33} "Recovering Theological Meanings in our Histories," p. 12.

\textsuperscript{34} CMR, p. 197.
created anew. A new person is born, a new community comes into being, a new heaven and a new earth take the place of the old creation. Under the profound impact of God's love in Christ history takes on new meaning. For this reason, Song describes history as the story of God's love for all peoples, or "God's love affair with human beings in all its pain and glory."

The fact that it is in this human time and space that God has become engaged in acts of redemption and creation is an assurance that Asian histories are not without God. Regardless of the fact that most Asian countries do not profess to be Christian, God loves them dearly and God's redemptive purpose is carried out in their histories. By complete identification with humanity in Jesus' suffering on the cross God is revealed to be ever-present with Asian humanity in suffering and in hope. And in virtue of God's love and redeeming presence, Asian humanity has the power to liberate itself from the shackles of present suffering. In God's love, Asian peoples have hope for a better future and a better world. How does all this relate to the reconstruction of theology in Asia envisaged by Song?

35 TWA, p. 16.
36 TUN, p. 106.
C. Reconstructing an Asian Theology of History.

1. Starting from below.

It may have become apparent in the light of what has been said already that the theological presupposition which undergirds Song's understanding of history is this: God acts redemptively in the histories of ALL nations.\(^{37}\) God in Jesus is fully and entirely present with human beings in their sufferings and aspirations.\(^{38}\) The fact all history has been taken up into God's love and care means that God is actually "in" history, actively participating in human activities and manifesting God's redeeming love in the events of peoples' lives.\(^{39}\)

Thus Song begins his theologising not with a doctrine of God but with Asian humanity and all that it means because it is in this particular historical context that Jesus Christ, the God-man is at work. What he advocates is a theology 'from below.' He claims that Christian theology has to deal with life on this 'anthropological' plane if it is to be vital and sensible. It has to be 'gravity-bound' and not 'other-worldly' if it is to be a living and dynamic theology.\(^{40}\) For, just as a fish dies when taken out of water, so is theology dead when it is divorced from the life and history of a people. Any

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\(^{37}\) TET, p. 79.

\(^{38}\) ibid., p. 80; c.f. TCG, 55; TWA, p. 96.

\(^{39}\) TCG, p. 57.

\(^{40}\) TUN, p. 29.
theology that is not rooted in the life of humanity is a 'homeless' and 'disembodied' theology. Such theology has no use for anybody and challenges no one.

2. Scope of Theology.

From the perspective of incarnation, Song takes the whole world as the context of God's work of salvation. This means that creation must serve as the framework of theological reflection. In other words, theology has to begin from the context of the history of humanity. Inevitably, this would mean that the scope of theology has no predetermined boundary. "The stuff of life is also the stuff of theology ..." he writes.41 Everything that has to do with human history and life itself - "human beings with all their problems: social, political, psychological, ecological or whatever" - are the subject matter of theology. The world with all its ideologies, organizations and structures, religions, arts and poetry, can and should be the subject of theological concern.42 Nothing is too humble or too insignificant for theological reflection. Even the noisy marketplace where people haggle over the price of a chicken and the "boat-people" from Vietnam fighting to get to shore are hard realities of life which have theological significance.

41 TET, p. 86.

42 ibid., p. 95.
3. The Hermeneutics of People.

Hence the reconstruction of christian theology in the Asian setting must begin with the interpretation of the histories of Asian peoples. Primarily, the task of Asian theologians is to interpret history in order to see where God is at work and to join in the mission of God for the redemption of Asian humanity. They must try to interpret those 'signs,' 'codes,' 'images,' 'symbols,' contained in Asian histories which embody the redemptive meanings for human life. Where, may we ask, does one locate these signs, codes, symbols, that the theologian has to interpret for redemptive meanings? The answer should be obvious by now: in history. In human beings, in human relations and the events of their life, God's love in action is manifested. "Where else can we encounter God but in human beings, in the community they constitute, in the history they forge?" In other words, the meaning of history comes from people - the people who, according to the faith of the Old Testament writers, are created in the image of God and who struggle to retain the image of God in them. He writes, "History is the story of people touched by the hand of God and made alive by the breath of God. It is in such people that the meaning of history must be found."  

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43 TWA, chaps. 1 - 5.
44 TUN, p. 9. c.f. TCG, p. 147. also TET, pp. 90-96.
45 "Liberation of People in History," p. 16.
The hermeneutics of history is thus the hermeneutics of people. To interpret history is to interpret how a certain group of people lives and dies, how a race is born and hastens to its decline, how a community of men and women is built and destroyed.\textsuperscript{46} As to how this theological interpretation of history must be carried out, again the key is redemption; the redemption people demand and the redemption God demands. Song asserts that when the redemption demanded by human beings and the redemption demanded by God intersect, a theological force is generated. This force seeks to restore life amidst death, justice within an unjust world, freedom and human dignity for the oppressed and humiliated.\textsuperscript{47} What is this force? It is the love of the God-man in action. This love redeems, heals and recreates. This love of the God-man is therefore not only the possibility of theology, but the alpha and omega of theology.\textsuperscript{48} It is in this respect that Song speaks of theology as a hermeneutics of the love of the God-man active in the human community.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} ibid.,

\textsuperscript{47} "Recovering Theological Meanings in Our Histories," p. 11.

\textsuperscript{48} TET, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{49} ibid., p. 91.

Jesus Christ according to Song is the meeting point between God's action and human response. In him he sees a new creation born out of the interpenetration of God's love and human love. He is the embodiment of God's love in action. Since theology takes its cue from Jesus Christ, it must reflect the love of the God-man in action. In other words, theology must be action-oriented. It must be an 'active' theology in the sense of bearing witness to this love of the God-man as it expresses itself in the life of human beings and the world.\(^50\) An active theology is one which grows out of the life of people. In so far as theology has to do with a reflection on the nature and contents of faith, an active theology has to grow out of the experience of faith in real-life situations of men and women. It has to direct its attention to discovering and expressing the 'particularity of love' in human community.

Song emphasizes that theology as the love of the God-man in action is communal in nature and expression. It is so because it is in human community that one is led to experience the redemptive nature of God's love as it acts in human society. But whilst love is communal in nature, it is fundamentally particularistic in orientation.\(^51\) For this

\(^{50}\) ibid., p. 79.

\(^{51}\) To demonstrate the point, Song uses the love of a Filipino mother for her child, as an example. In the particular expression of that mother's love toward her child, we can see something of the love which, say, a Polish mother shows to her child. In these two particular expressions of
reason, theology understood in terms of the love of the God-man in action must be informed by historical and situational particularity. This is not to be taken for exclusiveness or individualism. As Song has demonstrated with the example of a Filipino mother's love, particularity is the basis of universality. It is in particular practices and applications of love that we are led to see the universal nature of God's love in action.

Particularity therefore plays a crucial role in doing theology. In Asia, Christian theology of history must be concerned primarily with the concrete issues of life in Asia. It must begin with the concrete realities of Asian existence; problems Asian people face in their daily lives, the life and death crises people have to struggle with every day and so on. For example, what do theologians see in the children in Vietnam or in Cambodia, crying and dying as they are caught in crossfire: victims of human liberation or God's anguish over human cruelty? What do we make out of the rise and fall of dynasties in the long history of China: historical fatalism or God's involvement in human struggle against despotism? These are the types of concrete questions theologians must ask. For Song, the love of the God-man in action seems to manifest itself most vividly when a people, community or nation becomes involved in the life and death struggle against love, one can realize that there is a universal quality in the love a mother shows her child.

52 See, TUN pp. 7, 9-10, 29ff, 38.
the diabolic powers of inhumanity and destruction.\textsuperscript{53}

In the light of Song's emphasis on theological particularity, it is no surprise that in his own theological writings, we find a conscious effort to use Asian realities and human experiences (human suffering, cultures, religions, politics) as means for reflecting upon the content of the Christian faith. Indigenous concepts, imagery and symbols are used to express and convey the meaning of Christ to Asians.

D. Chinese History and God's Salvation.

In accordance with Song's view regarding the theological task of interpreting Asian histories, Song encourages his fellow Chinese Christians to reflect theologically on their own history. He says,

As Chinese-speaking theologians, we must make our theological response not exclusively in relation to the history of Israel or the history of Christianity in the West, but in relation to the long, fascinating but tortuous history of China, the ambiguous history of Hong Kong, the terribly uncertain future of Taiwan.\textsuperscript{54}

Where is God to be seen in this particular history? How is the love of God in action manifested in the life of Chinese people?

According to Song, the history of China is pregnant with theological meanings to be interpreted. It is filled with codes and signs which point to God's creative and redeeming

\textsuperscript{53} "Recovering Theological Meanings in our Histories," p. 10.

\textsuperscript{54} TUN, p. 10.
activity for humanity. As we have already indicated, Song argues that a direct relationship exists between God's redemptive acts and historical events. God acts in history universally in such a way that historical events in the extra-Jewish/Christian traditions bear direct relationships with the historical events in the Bible.\textsuperscript{55} In other words events in the history of China are vehicles through which God is revealed. God is encountered through historical events. Or, events of history bear witness to the love of God in so far as they reflect the redeeming presence of God with people.\textsuperscript{56}

Does this mean that all events in history can be identified with the acts of God for human salvation? Song

\textsuperscript{55} "New China and Salvation History: A Methodological Enquiry," p. 58.

\textsuperscript{56} Here, Song is indebted to Wolfhart Pannenberg and Schubert Ogden's views on history. Pannenberg's basic theological assertion regarding history is as follows: "History is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology. All theological questions and answers are meaningful only within the framework of the history which God has with humanity and through humanity with his whole creation - the history moving toward a future still hidden from the world but already revealed in Jesus Christ." Wolfhart Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. 1. translated by George H. Kehn, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 15. He thus even speaks of revelation as history, (c.f. Revelation as History, ed., Wolfhart Pannenberg (Macmillan, 1968) that is, history taken as a totality and not just certain events set apart as redemptive history. For Song, the merit of Pannenberg lies in his accentuation of the universal historical scope of revelation. As to what he means by 'universal history'; i.e. the totality of history which becomes carrier of God's revelation, he does not seem to say.

It is Ogden who expounds very effectively the direct nature of God's acts in history. According to him, "God's action is the act whereby, in each new present, he constitutes himself as God by participating fully and completely in the world of his creatures, thereby laying the ground for the next stage of the creative process. Because his love, unlike ours, is pure and unbounded, his relation to his creatures and theirs to him is direct and immediate." Schubert Ogden, The Reality of God, (London: SCM, 1967), p. 177.
certainly does not make this identification. He considers such identification absurd.\(^\text{57}\) However, the fact that God is "already in Jesus Christ, in the history of Israel, in human history and in the whole of creation"\(^\text{58}\) means that it is through historical events that the redemptive acts of God are discernible. Through human events, the love of God in action is expressed.

Song realizes that in order to differentiate between God's acts and events in history, a principle of selection is required. Thus he adopts the theological criterion established by Schubert Ogden. According to the latter, "wherever or insofar as an event in history manifests God's characteristic action as Creator and Redeemer, it actually is his act in a sense in which other historical events are not."\(^\text{59}\) In other words, where an event is seen to reflect the love of God revealed in Christ, i.e. love which aims at effecting the freedom and well-being of others, then God can be said to be manifested in that event in a way that is not true of other events.

Another important question may be asked here. Does it make sense to say that God acts in history? Or to put the question differently, what sense does it make to say that 'God acts in history'? Song agrees with Ogden when he says,

\(^{57}\) "New China and Salvation History," p. 59. c.f. TCG, p. 147.

\(^{58}\) TET, p. 80.

\(^{59}\) Schubert Ogden, op. cit., p. 182.
What is meant when we say that God acts in history is primarily that there are certain distinctively human words and deeds in which his characteristic action as Creator and Redeemer is appropriately represented or revealed.\(^{60}\)

By "human words and deeds," explains Song, Ogden does not mean only the words and deeds represented and revealed in ancient Israel and in the formation of the Christian Church. They can be also words and deeds of human beings anywhere and anytime; for according to him, the "capacity to discern meaning and to give it symbolic expression is what lies behind the whole complex phenomenon of human culture."\(^{61}\) In other words, with reference to the history of China, it is through the words and actions of Chinese people that the redeeming acts of the incarnate God are revealed. It is with this understanding that Song interprets all kinds of historical events — social, cultural, religious, political — as well as words and deeds of Chinese persons.

1. New China and Salvation History.

In his article, "New China and Salvation History: A Methodological Enquiry," Song attempts to interpret the theological meaning of 'New China' in relation to the question of salvation history.\(^{62}\) The most critical question is this:

\(^{60}\) ibid., p. 184.

\(^{61}\) ibid., p. 181.

\(^{62}\) What concerns Song mostly is the role of New China in world history as it emerges as a new communist power after the Cultural Revolution of 1949. Chairman Mao who led the Chinese revolution believed that by universalizing the dictatorship of the proletariat, it was possible to bring about a world
"Do we have in New China a viable alternative to the gospel of salvation interpreted, developed and propagated by Western Christianity?" In other words, are we standing at the threshold of a new era in which New China will play a decisive role in the human quest for the meaning of life? Is the 'salvation' we have seen in New China going to be the norm determining the shape and content of man's search for happiness? Is New China going to be the main instrument in the appearance of a new world order in which salvation of man is to have its fulfilment?

Song compares New China to the ancient people of Israel. For him, the Exodus experience of the Israelites has a "symbolic significance" which can be transposed to the Chinese experience such as that of the Long March. What he sees in both these cases is the translation of the power that lies behind the symbolic meaning of the Exodus into the shaping of the destiny of a nation and of the world. In the case of the Israelites, the Exodus is an experience of salvation. It marks the breaking of the yoke of slavery in Egypt and the joy of freedom brought about by God through Moses as agent. It represents the transition from being slaves into a new nation; a new community destined for God's redemptive purpose in the world. Thus in the Old Testament, the Exodus experience proves community structured on the vision of a classless society. Hence the Chinese revolution was to act as a catalyst for a world revolution that eventually would lead to global socialism.

63 "New China and Salvation History," p. 54.
64 ibid., p. 55.
to be the watershed of the Israelites' faith in the salvation that God wrought for them. The Exodus event leads the Israelites to the experience of a redeeming God who acts in history through certain nations and personalities. It marks the beginning of the history of salvation.

In a similar manner, the Long March symbolizes the experience of salvation in the context of the history of China. It is salvation in the sense that God's creative and redemptive activity in history is intensely acted out in the transition of the old China to the New China and in the continuing effort of the Chinese Communist Party to transform human society.\textsuperscript{65} Song sees in Mao Tse-tung's vision of a classless society as well as the revolutionary action which led to the liberation of the proletariat from oppression, poverty and injustices, a 'secularized version' of salvation history.\textsuperscript{66} Whilst the ideological thrust of Mao's thought which leads to the Chinese cultural revolution is that of atheistic materialism, and whilst that ideology necessarily leads to the de-sacralisation of religion, Song thinks that what we have in New China is no less a history of salvation for two reasons.

First, the thought of Mao Tse-tung and his vision for an equal society has come to fill the vacuum left by the defeat of religions. New China has emerged as a formidable spiritual force and institution contesting for supremacy against other spiritual forces and institutions represented by the

\textsuperscript{65} ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{66} ibid.,
time-honoured world’s great religions. In fact the communist ideology and its doctrines of dialectical materialism, sovereignty of humanity, classless society, etc have not merely proven to be politically viable for the Chinese people. They have become the daily spiritual food for the masses as well. In this vein Song writes, "What we may encounter in China today, ... is an ideological man in an ideological society. China, from top to bottom, is unashamedly ideological." What is stated in these words is the conviction regarding the depth with which the spirit of communism has arrested Chinese life and thought. It has come to shape not only the external life of Chinese people but also their minds and hearts.

Secondly, the Chinese Communist Party seems to have achieved what institutionalized religions have failed to achieve, namely, a society in which poverty, starvation and exploitation can no longer be tolerated as a fate for the masses of Chinese peasants. In the framework of socialist regimentation in China, the poor are fed and clothed;

67 ibid., p. 62.

68 "Hope in Christ - Its Authentication in Asia," IRM, Vol. 64, no. 253 (January 1975), p. 6. To demonstrate the point further, Song cites a poem by a Chinese girl in praise of Mao in "New China and Salvation History," p. 66:
If you do not study Chairman Mao’s writing for a day, The food will not taste good and the night will be unsleepable. If you do not study Chairman Mao’s writing for two days, You will feel as though your eyes are being covered with scales. If you do not study Chairman Mao’s writing for three days, You will be lost in direction and your mind will be dim."

Quoted from, Donald E. MacInnis, Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China, (Macmillan, 1972) Doc. 90, p. 287.
privileges enjoyed by the rich and the powerful are eliminated; fatalism which lets people fall prey to the forces of nature and to the inhumanity of other human beings disappears.\textsuperscript{69} What religions have failed to achieve in the long history of China, Mao and the Chinese revolution have brought into fruition. They have managed to render asunder the chains of fatalism which have kept the population in bondage in the feudal society of Old China.\textsuperscript{70}

Reflecting on Mao's assessment of Chinese history, Song sees the revolution as a revolution against the history of China, against the ideological instrument of enslavement of the masses. Through the event of the revolution, a new social order has come into being whereby the suffering of the masses is largely eliminated. The liberation of China from imperialism (Japan), feudalism and superstition has enabled the Chinese people to gain a new lease on life; it gives them new hope for a better future. It is in this sense that Song sees the Chinese revolution as bearing direct relationship with God's creative and redemptive activity in history.

\textsuperscript{69} "Hope in Christ - Its Authentication in Asia," p. 9.

\textsuperscript{70} In assessing the history of China, Mao Tse-tung is led to conclude that it was under feudal economic exploitation and political oppression that the Chinese peasants lived like slaves, in poverty and suffering, through the ages. Under the bondage of feudalism they had no freedom of person. The landlord had the right to beat, abuse or even kill them at will, and they had no political rights whatsoever. The extreme poverty and backwardness of the peasants resulting from ruthless landlord exploitation and oppression is the basic reason why Chinese society remained at the same stage of socio-economic development for several thousand years. Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 2, p. 308, quoted by Song in "New China and Salvation History," p. 62.
The liberation of the powerless, the poor, weak and proletarian masses represented by the Long March is no less attributable to the redemptive activity of the biblical God than the Exodus was for the suffering Israelites under bondage in Egypt. Just as the event of the Exodus in the history of the Israelites manifests the redeeming presence of God, so does the Chinese revolution and the emergence of New China. In this respect the history of China is a history of God's salvation. It is salvation history in the sense that divine action is manifested in the liberation of the suffering Chinese people from the evils of the old socio-political order. It is salvation in so far as the Chinese people, by means of the cultural revolution, have become liberated to become the makers of their own history. They have regained the freedom to be human; to become responsible for their own destiny.

2. Salvation: Continuation of Life through Hope.

Song uses human events in the histories of Asia to reflect upon and give expression to the meaning of God's salvation. Firstly, in the context of the discussion of New China and Salvation History, Song defines salvation in terms of humanity and new creation. Seen in relation to the event of the incarnation, salvation means the "freedom to be human," he says.71 In the incarnation, we see God's freedom to become truly human. In Jesus Christ God has shown what it means to

71 "New China and Salvation History," p. 66.
be human. And as Jesus has demonstrated in his life and death, to be human means to be open to God and other human beings.

In interpreting the history of China, Song sees in the event of the emergence of New China the reality of salvation in the experience of the Chinese people. China, once torn and laid waste by natural disasters and by the human brutality (e.g. civil wars and the war of resistance against Japan) has begun to function again for the welfare of the Chinese population. Once dominated by fear and darkness, New China seems to have assumed a constructive role for its members.

What New China now seems destined to represent is the possibility of a future classless society in which the importance of one's humanity becomes the norm rather than the exception. This certainly is a new order, considering the inhumanity of Old China under the feudal system. In virtue of the fact that it resembles the new order which God brought forth out of darkness and chaos at the beginning of creation, New China is really a new creation. It must be pointed out that in interpreting the emergence of New China in relation to God's salvation for the world, Song is not equating New China with salvation in the fullest sense of the word. He does not mean that New China is to be understood as the Kingdom of God realized (as salvation is generally understood from a Christian viewpoint). Rather the emergence of New China can

72 Song's criticism of the totalitarian form of government which followed after the revolution shows this clearly. He argues that any form of government based on the absolutization of power cannot be conducive to real human freedom. True human freedom includes the freedom of the spirit. But obviously, such freedom of the spirit is precluded in a communist state where absolute power is vested on the
be seen to be an experience of salvation in the sense that it enables the Chinese people to experience a sense of liberation from a life of suffering. It gives them a sense of freedom once more to be themselves thus allowing them to rebuild human community through hope for a better future.

Secondly, Song defines salvation in terms of the continuation of communal life through the power of hope rooted in God. Jesus Christ is the "seed of life" in the womb of humanity. Through the womb of Mary, God has intervened in human history by creating a new life, a life that will be responsible to both God and humanity, a life that binds God and humanity in a new bond of love and redemption. Jesus as the seed of a new creation in the womb of Mary is the fulfilment of life intended by God for humanity. Jesus the seed of life in the womb of humanity is therefore also the "seed of hope" which makes possible the continuation of life of the human community from the past, present and future.

In expressing salvation in this way, Song is utilizing an Asian outlook on salvation which places great emphasis on the continuity of family life. As a point of departure for his discussion of salvation in terms of the continuation of life, Song uses a poem by a South Vietnamese poet describing

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ruling party. Moreover, when the openness to one's fellow human beings as well as openness to God is categorically denied as the Communist regime has done, no real freedom is possible. "When one central power dominates and dictates what a person should think, say and act, which seems to be the case in New China, then obviously a person is deprived of the freedom to be truly human." ibid., p. 67.

73 TET, p. 151.
74 TET, p. 142.
the grief and hope of a young pregnant wife who has just received the sad news of the death of her husband on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{75}

War, Song reflects, is like an act of rape committed against God's creation.\textsuperscript{76} The worst thing it has done, besides the physical destruction, is the social destruction of an entire human community. Quoting Frances FitzGerald, Song writes, "Physical death is everywhere, but it is the social death caused by destruction of the family that is of overriding importance."\textsuperscript{77} The statement points to the depth with which Asians regard the family. The family is the hub of Asian society. For Asians to lose their family connections means they have lost their sense of belonging and relatedness. Destruction of the family means the destruction of one's

\textsuperscript{75} The poem, set in the context of the Vietnam War, is called "First Tragedy." For the sake of space, it is written here in prose and not in its original poetic form.

The yellow telegram with its stark typewritten letters announces death. She knew it would be his death, still she mumbles the words telling herself, telling herself don't cry, for this is common in war. Who is ever free of tragedy? Just lie still, lie still, you are free now my darling.

Constantly thinking of the future with a withering faith, she has painted her own portrait, the high collar the still-life round eyes, the bombs the grenades, everything is black because nothing is left. Who has not suffered in a war?

In confusion she looks down at the seed coming to life in her, coming to the misery of life. Try to grow up like your father my darling. (Quoted in TET, pp. 142-3).

\textsuperscript{76} It is an act of sheer irrationality. It dehumanizes people and reduces them to statistics of deaths and injuries. It disfigures and destroys the image of God in humanity.

essential being. One becomes a nobody. Losing one's family means one's death and hence the death of a community.

It is against this background that Song interprets the suffering and hope of the young widow in the poem. With the death of her husband, she senses the disintegration of her immediate community, her family. The power that once sustained her, that is, her faith in her family and community is gone. Without that, her life has become meaningless. Her own self disintegrates into nothingness - lonely, torn apart and without a future. Yet, as she "looks down at the seed coming to life in her" she realizes that the hope for the continuation of her life, her family and community is pulsating in her womb. Hence she mumbles - "try to grow up like your father my darling." (Refer poem in note. 75)

According to Song the seed of life in the womb of this Asian mother is also the seed of hope for her family, community and nation. Hope based on the seed of life in the womb of Asian humanity is the power which makes possible the continuation of the life of Asian communities. It is this hope which unites members of the human family in anticipation of the fulfilment of life. It makes possible the restoration of health and wholeness to human community.

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78 According to Song, Asian faith is essentially a social event. It has to do with the experiences of a community and of family devotion. This kind of faith finds corporate and communal expressions e.g. in festivals, spontaneous gatherings in the courtyard of a community temple, worship at the family altar and so forth. Faith is not a rational understanding of what one believes. Nor is it an expression of one's will and determination to believe as an individual in isolation from the community. TET, pp. 144-5.
Song sees in the story of this Asian woman's life a sign or pointer to the salvation of God worked out in the womb of humanity. In Mary's womb God's passion intersect with human passion to create a new life that sheds light on and redeem all histories. The seed of life in Mary's womb signals the beginning of a new era. Jesus Christ is the new creation, the new history and the new human being. Jesus is therefore the seed of hope of salvation for humanity. In him, God has come to reconstruct human community. Through the power of love, human beings are able to restore the kinship and family relationship established by God in creation.


Frequently Song draws attention to the role of Chinese sages such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, Mo Ti, Mencius in the history of ancient China. He sees in the words and deeds of these figures a zest for love and righteousness which is characteristic of the mind of God as expressed by the prophets. During the period of the Warring States (481-221 B.C.) Mencius for example, when invited by King Hui of Liang to advise the throne on how to gain "profit" for his kingdom, confronted the king with these words: "Why must your Majesty use that word 'profit'? What I am provided with are

79 TET, p. 151.

80 This is the time in the history of ancient China when princes and kings were all profit-conscious and power-hungry. Obsessed with greed and the need to expand their territory and enrich their personal wealth, their actions demonstrated a lack of moral scruples in dealing with their subjects.
counseled to love [jen] and righteousness [yi], and these are my only topics.\textsuperscript{81}

Without averting his eyes from the face of the king, Mencius went on to criticize the way the royal court has lived in luxury and waste at the expense of a starving and dying people.

Your dogs and swine eat the food of people, and you do not make any restrictive arrangements. There are people dying from famine on the roads, and you do not issue the stores of your granaries for them. When people die, you say, 'It is not owing to me; it is owing to the year.' In what does this differ from stabbing a man and killing him, and then saying - 'it was not I; it was the weapon?' Let your Majesty cease to lay the blame on the year, and instantly from all the nation the people will come to you.\textsuperscript{82}

Without stopping there, Mencius pursued the subject even further by pointing out to the king the seriousness of his misgovernment and the need for a radical change of heart on the part of his royal court and himself.

In your kitchen there is fat meat; in your stables there are fat horses. But your people have the look of hunger, and in the wilds there are those who have died of famine. This is leading on beasts to devour people ...

Beasts devour one another, and people hate them for doing so. When a prince, being the parent of his people, administers his government so as to be chargeable with leading on beasts to devour people, where is his parental relation to the people?\textsuperscript{83}

According to Song, Mencius' act of confronting the king with the truth displays the same prophetic spirit that we see in


\textsuperscript{82} "The Works of Mencius," p. 132, quoted in TCG, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{83} ibid., p. 133, quoted in TCG, p. 157.
the bible. The fact that he unflinchingly exposed the injustice of the royal court and dared to compare the government to ferocious beasts reminds us of the words and deeds of the biblical prophets. Whether he was conscious of it or not, he must have been moved by the power that is above every other power. Like the Israelite prophets, he must have been a man of God.

The same thing is said of Confucius. Song takes a number of incidents in Confucius' as illustrative of his endowment with a strong sense of divine mission. One such incident involves the attempt on the sage's life designed by Huan T'ui, the minister of war. Aware of the lurking danger and fearing for his master's life, a disciple with whom Confucius was travelling from Wei to Ch' an urged him to make haste and escape. But with complete calm, Confucius is reported to have said: "Heaven begat the power (te) that is in me. What have I to fear from such a one as Huan T'ui?"

Te, Song explains, literally means virtue. This is what Chinese rulers are expected to cultivate in order to govern in accordance to the will of Heaven. But 'te' is not merely 'human' virtue. It is "divine power" that works in human beings and preserves the world. It comes from God and becomes the source of ethical principles, political conduct, and human relationships. A sage is not just a virtuous person but one who is conscious of this te, the divine power in him, and

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84 c.f. Isa. 5: 8, Jer. 4: 30; Amos 4: 1-3,

seeks to be a witness to it. His mission is to see that this te prevails in human society. It is this te that gave Confucius confidence in time of danger.

In Song's interpretation, Confucius' trust in this divine power (te) is analogous to faith in God. It is such trust, such faith and such spirit as demonstrated by Confucius and Mencius which inspired and encouraged many scholars, historians, and statesmen in the history of China to bear the torch of light and truth in a nation constantly plagued by corruption, nepotism, exploitation and despotism.

Both Confucius and Mencius, like the prophets of the Old Testament, had such a strong sense of responsibility toward the welfare of the nation. Inspired by reverence for 'Heaven,' they took upon themselves a mission resembling the mission of the Biblical God, namely, to see righteousness and love prevail in their land. Both were conscious of a divine mission entrusted to them. And it is this sense of mission that gave them courage, wisdom, and faith before the ruling powers of their times. In Song's view, it is in such people as these that we see a manifestation of the Spirit of God at work in the history of China.86

86 TCG, p. 160.
Recognition of cultural and religious pluralism in the modern world and the need to affirm them in the light of the christian faith form the gist of Song’s discussion of the theme of theology and culture. In dealing with the subject, Song wants to find a way of reappropriating the Christian faith in the particular context of Asia. "What meaning does the Christian faith have for Asian faiths and cultures?" he asks.¹ His concern is with the place of Asian religions and cultures in relation to the theological task of the Christian church to express and to witness to the redemptive love of God in Christ. How does the love of God in Christ relate to the non-christian faiths and cultures of Asia?

A. Sources of Concern.

Underlying Song’s concern is an apparent dissatisfaction with the rigid attitude normally displayed by Christians towards non-Christiaan faiths and cultures. He locates the roots of this rigid attitude of Christians in the missionary efforts of the Western Churches to christianize Asia. In both her theology and practice of mission, the Christianity propagated by Western missionaries has been unable to affirm a direct relationship between the gospel and the spiritualities which have shaped the lives of Asian people for

centuries.

Regarding theology, missionary Christianity has viewed revelation as being confined to the church. Outside the church, there is no revelation, at least no revelation leading to salvation.\(^2\) Such an exclusive attitude presupposes that Christianity has monopoly on the truth of God and that non-Christian cultures and religions have their origin in a source other than God. It presupposes that Asian cultures have no direct relationship with God’s redemptive activity in the world. At best, they are misguided; at worst, perverted and demonic. They amount to a distortion of the truth of God.

With regard to mission practice, the central emphasis of mission on the act of converting non-christians to the Christian faith only serves to hinder the communication of the gospel message by creating a negative attitude amongst converts towards their own cultures. For, implicit in the emphasis on conversion is a demand for a complete disavowal of one’s cultural and religious heritage. Thus it follows that to be a christian means to break completely from the pre-christian past, including both religions and cultures.

In Song’s mind, the dichotomy between gospel and culture which undergirds missionary attitude and strategy is unnecessary and false. It has had drastic repercussions on both the mission and theology of the church in Asia. Firstly, there is an apparent resentment of Christianity by people of other religions in Asia. The following words of a Hindu adherent serve to demonstrate the reality of this resentment:

\(^2\) ibid., p. 73.
The Christians are those who believe that they alone are the select and beloved children of our common Almighty Father, and they alone are blessed with a full and perfect knowledge of true religion, that by a fearful distinction established for their exclusive advantage, millions of their fellow creatures have, since the beginning of the world, been doomed to live and die in utter mental darkness, nay to eternal perdition, through the irrevocable and partial decree of an unjust and jealous God.\textsuperscript{3}

Apparent in this statement is a criticism of the Christian attitudes relating to the question of the truth of God. What the Hindu speaker resents is the exclusive claim of Christians to "the common Almighty Father" and the christian belief that only Christianity embodies the perfect knowledge which leads to salvation.

Song believes the resentment is not unwarranted, for, during the missionary era, such christian attitudes apparently have formed the norm rather than the exception. Father Valesco's words serve to demonstrate this.\textsuperscript{4}

When I look at the Japanese, I sometimes wonder whether a true religion - one that seeks after eternity and the salvation of the soul as we understand them - can develop in that country. There is too great a gap between their form of godliness and that which we Christians know as faith.\textsuperscript{5}

Implicit in this statement is the belief of the writer that the perception of religion and salvation as Christians


\textsuperscript{4} Father Valesco is said to be a Franciscan priest sent to feudal Japan in the 17th century. Refer, Shusaku Endo, \textit{The Samurai}, translated by Van C. Gessel (New York: Vintage, 1984), p. 69.

\textsuperscript{5} Quoted in SOS, p. 10.
"understand it" is the only right way. The cause of resentment towards Christianity by people of other faiths in Asia is largely due to the "as-we-understand-it" attitude of Christians towards matters of religious belief. What other people think and how they perceive matters of ultimate concern is deemed insignificant. Certainly this is insensitive in Song's view. Furthermore, by making Christian understanding the norm and criterion for judging all matters of theological import reveals a failure on the part of Christians to acknowledge the freedom of the Spirit of God to "blow where it wills" (John 3: 8) - the Spirit that inspired Jesus himself to cross the frontiers of race, culture and religion.6

Another repercussion on the mission of the church is the resultant weakening of the power of the gospel to reach the majority of Asian people. That is to say, the failure of missionaries to account for Asian cultures inevitably led to the isolation of the Christian church in Asia. Using China as a case in point, Song claims that because "most missionaries turned away from Chinese culture as pagan and un-Christian," their missionary efforts could not touch the core of Chinese culture and feel its spirit.7 Similarly, the language employed by the church becomes strange to those around her. Since the proclamation of the gospel was done at the expense of Chinese culture, Christianity became powerless in a land totally unacquainted with the Christian culture represented

6 ibid.,

7 TCG, p. 200.
by the missionaries. She becomes an isolated entity sharing little in common with the needs and aspirations of people to whom she is supposed to be ministering.

Finally, with regard to the question of theology, Song claims that the negative attitude of Christians toward Asian cultures has produced unnecessary and grave consequences throughout the history of the Church in Asia. This anti-culture spirit expresses itself in the Christian efforts to wipe out what they perceive to be idols regardless of whether the so-called idols were actually regarded by Asians as gods to be worshipped or just cultural or religious symbols.

In China for instance, Song shows that the rejection of idols may have seemed, at face value, simply rejection of superstition. But what began as a war between Christianity and Chinese superstition in fact developed into a war between Christianity and Chinese culture. The Taiping Rebellion was a direct result of this tension between Christianity and Chinese culture. The tragedy of Taiping Christianity thus

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8 ibid.,

9 ibid., pp. 192-215. The Taiping Rebellion is considered to be the largest internal upheaval of 19th century China and "ranks with the greatest uprisings of Chinese history." (p. 193). As a political movement, it attempted to overthrow the ruling Ch’ing dynasty (Manchu) and to establish a new dynasty — "the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace." At the same time, the movement is religious since the ideology of the Taiping Revolutionaries is derived from the Christian faith of the early missionaries and their Chinese converts. Through the visionary experiences of one Hung Hsiu-Ch’uan, the Taiping movement began as a religious (Christian) movement which had the promise of liberating the Chinese from the corruption and cruelty of the Manchu rulers and bringing about much needed peace. However, the Taiping leaders soon turned the movement into an unrestrained iconoclastic crusade against religious
highlights the fact that Christian missionaries and converts, with few exceptions, were greatly mistaken in their total rejection of Chinese culture as incompatible with the Gospel. ¹⁰

In a keynote address delivered at the inaugural consultation of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, held in Kansai Seminar House, Kyoto, Japan (1987), Song points to the continued presence of this Christian anti-culture spirit in a movement currently sweeping the Anglican diocese of Singapore. This movement aims at the systematic destruction of non-Christian and therefore allegedly 'heathen' artifacts in the possession of Christian homes and families. An object of the peculiar detestation of the religious purists is the Chinese dragon.

Song argues that a movement aimed at wiping away the dragon is really an attack on Asian cultures. This is because the Chinese dragon is not the personification of evil as it is often wrongly assumed to be on the basis of Revelation 12 & 13. For Asians, the dragon is only a metaphor which characterizes Asian cultures. He writes:

and cultural traditions of China based on the absolutist kind of fundamentalism of the first missionaries and their converts. This created much concern among Chinese people. Eventually under the leadership of Tseng Kuo-fan, a powerful Confucian scholar-squire and a staunch defender of Chinese culture, the Chinese majority, realizing that what was at stake was their culture and tradition and not the Manchu throne, rose against the Taiping leaders and their followers. In 1958, they besieged the Taiping Capital, Nanking, thus putting an end to the Taiping form of Christianity.

Dragon is of course ... a figure of speech for culture - Thai culture, Taiwanese culture, Japanese culture, etc. And how the dragon has penetrated the life and history of Chinese-speaking people! Their culture is 'dragon culture.'

Chinese culture in particular has been dominated by the dragon for 5000 years. Therefore, to try and do away with the dragon is in fact trying to do away with cultural roots and with national identities.

Song claims that this "anti-culturism" is the root cause of theological poverty of the Asian Church. For, the removal of culture means also the removal of the basis of theological discourse and reflection. "With the dragon gone, their [Asian] theological creativity is gone as well. The result is theological poverty." What does this mean for the task of theologians and Christians in Asia?

B. Asian Cultures and Theological Creativity.

Song argues that there is no such thing as Christian theology outside, apart from or detached from culture. The culture and history of which Christians are a part by birth

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12 ibid., The 'dragon' has served as a symbol of divine office, exceptional ability, goodness, hope for prosperity and creative power. Hence during imperial times, the emperor was called "true dragon, the son of heaven," and his countenance was "dragon countenance." A newly married couple is understood as the union of a dragon and a phoenix, and parental hopes for their married son is that he will "become a dragon."

13 ibid.,

14 ibid., p. 31.
and by association is their theological home. Any theology therefore that is culturally neutral is a "homeless" theology. Unfortunately, this has been the case with theology in Asia. It has been a homeless theology because Asians themselves have disowned their own home.  

Christians and theologians have misunderstood the nature of culture. On the one hand, they have assumed that the Christian faith, since it is revealed, has to be free from all cultural trappings, forgetting that even the Word of God has "to become flesh and dwell among us." (John 3. 16). On the other hand, Asians have dogmatically concluded that the images, symbols, values, customs, life and world views developed within a culture shaped by religions other than Christianity are to be rejected because they express nothing but corruption of the human mind and distortion of God's truth. Yet they forget that human cultures are manifestations of the creative dynamic of God.  

Thus Song asserts that any theological activity must be culture-bound. The simple fact that even God's revelation has to be communicated through the medium of language is an obvious indication that culture and theology ought not to be treated as strange bedfellows. It suggests that a theology for Asia will have to emerge out of the encounter of our understanding the divine message in the Bible and our own

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15 TUN, p. 12.

16 SOS, p. 13.

17 ibid.,
cultures, religions and so on.\textsuperscript{18}

1. What is Culture?

Such a question obviously cannot obtain an easy consensus of opinion because culture may be defined from a number of perspectives: materialist, idealist, psychological, anthropological, sociological etc. In the contemporary world, culture tends to be interpreted in relation to the process of modernization. Thus no definition can really exhaust the meaning of the concept. However, from the theological perspective of creation, Song views culture as comprehensive expressions of the creative dynamic released from its origin and takes forms in painting, sculpture, music, architecture, technology and so on. "Culture as a whole is none other than the manifestation of God's creative power translated into actual forms and events."\textsuperscript{19}

Since the creative power of human beings derives from the dynamic of God's creation, it follows therefore that human cultures are rooted in God's power manifested in the creation of an orderly and form-ful universe out of chaos and formless darkness in the beginning. In other words, creation may be regarded as God's culture in its totality. Conversely, all cultures find their place in the order of God's creation.


It is in connection with this theological understanding of cultures that Song considers Tylor's definition of culture as a useful working definition. According to the latter,

Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnological sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society.\(^{20}\)

In this definition, culture is understood as the sum total of all those aspects and dimensions which govern and affect human life in community. Culture encompasses everything pertaining to human existence.

Culture is not just monuments commemorating national achievements and technological progress. It is not to be identified solely with accepted social behaviours and conventions. Nor is culture limited to a particular belief system as many Christians have wrongly tended to believe.\(^{21}\)

Rather culture encompasses all those. Beside systems of belief, culture includes "knowledge, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of society." For Song, ultimately culture has to do with human beings.

Culture is manifestations of what human beings as members of a certain society are and what they do. It is the expressions of the human power to live, love, think, act and

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\(^{21}\) In Song's assessment, traditionally what seems to matter for most Christians and theologians is culture as belief systems that 'differ' from the Christian belief system. It is culture conceived in this narrow way that falls to the theological axe wielded by most Christian churches. But culture is much broader and deeper than that.
dream. In short, culture is us human beings as individuals, as members of a family and a nation, as men, women and children related to one another in a human community.  

"Culture is us," Song writes, "what we are, what we stand for, how we live and how we create meanings that transcend the present." To speak of culture therefore is to speak of human beings. To weaken a culture is to weaken the humanity of the persons who have created it. To destroy a culture is to destroy the bond that binds men and women as members of a society.

2. The Language of Culture.

Each culture has a language particular to it. Just as each language has its own peculiar grammar, syntax and semantics which differentiates it from other languages, so does each culture. Language therefore symbolises culture; it stands for culture. It represents the life, thought and history of a particular culture. Song believes that in the history of Christianity in Asia, theological language has been the language of the Western culture. Because of its grammar, syntax and semantics, bafflement and confusion has often struck Asian people who have been brought up in cultures with a completely different grammar, syntax and semantics of meanings. A Christian theology for Asia will therefore have

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22 SOS, p. 16.

to take account of the language of its culture. For, until Asian Christians are able to master the grammar of culture in Asia, decipher its syntax and penetrate its semantic, no creative theology would emerge. Without mastering this language of cultures, theology in Asia would only be an "exercise in futility." It will remain a "discarnate" rather than an "incarnate" theology; that is, a "ghost theology" or a theology without flesh. 24

(a) Grammar of Culture.

According to Song, the "grammar of culture" is the basic elements which constitute a culture. Such elements include "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and capabilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of a society," to recall Tylor's definition. Just as a verbal expression has its basic components (noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, etc), so has culture. Art, as a component of culture includes folktales, stories, poetry, songs, odes, paintings etc. These are the forms in which the spirit of Asian cultures comes to concrete expression.

Custom is another component of the grammar of culture. Customs are those usual practices or habitual ways of behaving and social conventions carried on by tradition and enforced by social sanctions. These customs and socially acquired habits serve to regulate people's lives in community. Since

they are simply what people observe and do to maintain order of the community and to carry out one's life with some degree of predictability and confidence, they do not have to come under moral or religious scrutiny. Unfortunately, in Song's observation, many Christians have not seemed to realize this. As a result, customs and habits (that is, culture) of Asia have not been warranted with the respect they rightly deserve. Worse still, they have often been mistakenly written off, so to speak, as being totally against the Christian gospel.\textsuperscript{25}

Morals or ethics is another element in the grammar of culture. In a human society, relationships are built on certain moral principles and ethical concerns. These principles and concerns are not neutral. They distinguish one community from another. They prescribe for members of a community what to think and how to decide and act in certain ways. They regulate the order of a society and provide the basis for political structure. Deeply embedded in the traditions of a nation, they shape the consciousness of people and form the ethical standards of their community. In Asia, one such ethical principle is that of 'filial piety.'\textsuperscript{26}

According to Song, this grammar of culture has nourished the minds and souls of Asian people from ancient times to the

\textsuperscript{25} SOS, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{26} In China, for example, the principle of filial piety governs the ethical code known as the "five human relationships" (wu luen). They are the relationship between: (1) ruler and subjects, (2) father and sons, (3) husband and wife, (4) brother and brother, and (5) friend and friend. These five relationships have molded society, shaped political structures and dictated ethical thoughts and conduct of people for centuries. ibid., pp. 24-5.
present. And although this grammar of culture is alien to the culture of the West with which Christianity has been associated for the past two millennia, this does not mean that Asian cultures are unrelated to the Christian gospel. In fact, there is, in the light of the bible, ample evidence to show that in the grammar of Asian cultures, we are dealing directly with the grammar of God's creating and redeeming activity in Asia since the beginning of time. 27

To demonstrate the point, let us look at Song's discussion of art as an element of the grammar of culture. Generally speaking, art has been excluded from the theological purview of Christians because it is considered to have no relation whatsoever to faith or religious belief. This verdict becomes all the more severe on Asian art forms in view of the fact it is a product of a culture unrelated to Christianity. Song argues that such a verdict is false because it is based largely on an evaluation of culture on the basis of belief alone. But as we have seen, culture is that "complex whole" which includes, among other things, 'art'.

As an art form, a folktale for example, is not simply a story and nothing more. Consider the biblical stories such as that of Jacob's flight from Esau (Gen. 28). While the story is told primarily to explain why the name of the city of Luz was changed to Beth-El, 28 it tells much more than that. It

27 ibid., p. 32.

tells about the ancient history of Israel, their tribal conflicts, religious beliefs, social customs and more. It shows how the people lived, struggled, believed and developed into a nation. It also shows how Israel through the person of Jacob became bound up with Yahweh, the Creator and Redeemer of the world. So the story therefore is not simply an 'aetiological story.' It also speaks of God's activity with the people of Israel.

Similarly, Asian aetiological folktales have more to tell than one may presume. One such folktale speaks of the origin of a city called "Banjuwangi" in Java, Indonesia. The folktale tells of the king's minister who lived a happy life with his beautiful wife. But he had a mother who was very cruel to his wife. One day the mother had her son sent on a long journey. During his absence, his wife gave birth to a baby boy. Her mother-in-law stole the baby from the crib and drowned it in a river. When the minister-son returned, she accused her daughter-in-law of murdering the baby. Believing it to be true, he drew his sword to kill his wife. She pleaded to no avail that she was innocent. All she could do was to ask him to take her to the river so that she could prove her innocence. No sooner had they reached the river than she jumped into the water and drowned herself. Then an incredible thing happened.

As the minister stood there in great sorrow, he saw two beautiful flowers appear out of the smelly, dirty river water. One flower was bigger and taller than the other. And what fragrant odour they began to give out! The minister, already stupefied, heard, to his great astonishment, the big flower say to him: "Look at this flower beside me. It is our child I met on the bottom of the river. He himself will tell you who drowned him in the river." The small flower then said: "Father! Mother never did anything wrong. She was an upright person. It was my grandmother, your mother, who drowned me. ... I am very happy now that I can be with Mother. From now on we two will always be together and no one can ever separate us again." So saying, the small flower bowed its head. It leaned very closely to the big flower as if mother and child were embracing each other. Still embracing, they slowly vanished to the bottom of the river. They never appeared again. But they left behind them fragrant odour to fill the entire surroundings. And the smelly, dirty water turned into clean and pure water. Later, people crossing over to Bali from that city on the eastern tip of Java called it 'Banjuwangi,'
story focuses on how the city came to be called 'Fragrant Water'\textsuperscript{30} as a result of a conflict of love and affection among members of a family, at the same time it discloses deeper dimensions of life in Asian society. It points the reader to the dynamics of culture at work in that society. Moreover, it makes one aware of the presence of saving grace or redemptive power in that human community. Such redemptive power, Song reflects, no doubt is intrinsically related to God's redemptive activity in the world. It is in this respect that Song regards the folktale as "theological in nature."\textsuperscript{31} That is to say, it has something to do with the divine as well as the human. And for that reason, art, in its various forms, has to be part of serious theological consideration. Art as part of a culture has a theological dimension that needs to be explored.

(b) Syntax of culture.

'Syntax' according to the \textit{Concise Oxford Dictionary} is "the analysis of the grammatical arrangement of words in speech or writing to show their connection and relation."\textsuperscript{32} In language, syntax refers to the arrangement of word forms to show their mutual relations in the sentence. The sentence meaning 'fragrant water.' See SOS, pp. 17-8.

\textsuperscript{30} 'Banju' means water; 'wangi' means fragrant.

\textsuperscript{31} SOS, p. 19.

and not individual words is the basic unit of meaning. A word by itself remains a concept without a meaning until it is related to other words. How the individual words are connected in relation to each other in a sentence provides the key to a universe of meanings. When applied to culture, syntax becomes the analysis of the mutual relations of the basic elements or components in a culture. This is what Song means by the "syntax of a culture." It is the interconnections between the basic components (grammar) of a particular culture giving rise to meaning.

Song points out that this is an important fact of reality that must be remembered in any consideration of the relationship between theology and culture. It must be realized that the components of a culture (knowledge, art, belief, morals, custom and so on) are like individual words in a sentence. They are interrelated with varied degrees of intensity. Therefore they are to be interpreted theologically within the context of the complex whole of that culture. Why? Obviously because lifted out of the context of that "complex whole," a component of the culture might wrongly be taken to mean something completely different. And that does not do justice to the culture concerned.

No element can be detached from a complex whole of the culture to which it belongs and attached to another complex whole of a culture without creating distortion of its meaning in the original culture.\(^{33}\)

Unfortunately, Song claims this has been how Christian

\(^{33}\) C. S. Song, "Dragon, Garuda and Christian Theology," p. 34.
theology has always been done in relation to cultures outside the western world. The so-called "ancestor worship" is a case in point.34

According to Song, this was a clear case of a Chinese custom taken out of its cultural syntax and put on trial at the court of a foreign culture. Inevitably, the verdict cannot be justified. For one thing, the term ancestor worship in itself is a misnomer. The expression "ancestor rites" seems more appropriate because it is much closer to reality. Ancestor rites are the extension of rites that shape and condition the family, society and the nation.35 They have served as the ideological basis for the hierarchical structure that governs the five relationships in Chinese society.36 The male-centred social, political and religious systems and traditions which became the norm and frame of thought and conduct are perpetuated in ancestor rites.37 Thus ancestor worship can be seen to have more to do with social structure - familial or tribal relationships - than with faith and religious belief.

34 Notably, ancestor worship was a bone of theological contention among both Catholic and Protestant missionaries in China. Eventually it came to gain papal condemnation and Protestant prohibition. For the Protestant Church, the judgement was made at a missionary conference in 1907 that "worship of ancestors was incompatible with an enlightened and spiritual conception of the Christian Faith." And since that was the case, it "could not be tolerated by the Church." Ralph R. Covell, Confucius, Buddha and Christ, History of the Gospel in Chinese, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986), p. 120. Quoted in "Dragon, Garuda and Christian Theology," p. 34.

35 ibid., p. 35.

36 Refer to note 26 above.

37 ibid.,
For another thing, contrary to popular perception by outsiders, ancestor worship, within its own cultural syntax, is not understood in terms of worshipping the dead as powers that are opposed to God. In fact, the spirits of ancestors are not viewed as transcendental powers at all. Instead, they are treated as objects to be feared and placated. There is for Song, an important distinction between worship of the dead and placation of the dead. When this distinction is taken into account, then ancestor worship in its most popular form could be seen to be quite different from what it is commonly branded to be by Christians. 38 Quoting a Chinese Christian, Song writes,

Ancestor worship, for the Chinese, is the embodiment of reverence for the past and continuity with the past, and of the strong and deep family system and therefore of the Chinese motivation for living... Practically, the motivation of Chinese conduct is: 'Do good so that thou mayest not be a disgrace to thy ancestors'... It is the reason for a Chinese being a Chinese. As for the forms of worship, only by the widest stretch of imagination could they be called idolatry, as the Christian churches called them... As for kneeling before the tablets at worship, which is the real point of objection of the christian churches, it was forgotten that Chinese knees were always more flexible than Western knees and that we often knelt before our parents and grandparents on formal occasion when they were living. The bending of the knees was an act of homage. 39

The statement shows that contrary to western christian interpretation, what is involved in ancestor worship is not so much a case of treating ancestors as deities as a practical

38 TBT, p. 154.

demand to fulfil the social and family responsibilities extended to the deceased person. Its performance is basically for the purpose of placating and "commemorating" the dead.\(^40\) As such it is a rite.

Underlying this rite is the presupposition involving the living presence of the dead in society. This, according to Song, is an "underdeveloped stage of human consciousness" which sees the realm of the dead as a continuation of the realm of the living.\(^41\) Thus to understand ancestor worship, one has to view it in the light of the contextual complex whole of which it is part. As soon as it is taken out of its own syntax and interpreted without connection to other components of its culture, its meaning would naturally become distorted.

(c) Semantic of Culture.

Semantics refers to the study of meaning. It is a discipline that pursues the significance of things; an art that penetrates the inner depth of beings. For this reason, semantics is of crucial importance in the formulation of the relation between theology and culture. In the case of a cultural complex that includes religious beliefs, semantics becomes the heart of theological inquiry. And at the heart of this theological semantic is human persons. This is because meanings can never be divorced from the people themselves. The

\(^{40}\) TET, p. 152.

\(^{41}\) ibid., pp. 153-4.
semantic of a culture is not given by the culture itself, but the human persons who create that culture. Song writes,

The meaning of a culture comes from people who create the space of meaning and destroy it, who fill time with meaning and nullify it — the human persons who are destined to wrestle with the meaning and meaninglessness of life and history until the end of time.42

Inevitably, meaning has to be personal and not impersonal, relational and not private, historical and not fictional, that is, meaning that affects human beings not only in themselves but in their relations to the world in which they live, and of course to God.

As the previous statement indicates, the key to the semantic of a culture is human persons — their well-being, their destiny, their humanity. For Song, this is how a creative theology can be possible. Through a direct questioning of one's own culture and how people perceive meaning in it, a theology of culture could be developed. Jesus himself was able to produce a creative theology, because he made human beings and the fulfilment of their humanity the focus of his ministry. From the Jewish syntax of culture based on the Sabbath, Jesus created a powerful theology based not on tradition, law or piety, but on human beings as the centre of culture. "The Sabbath was made for the sake of human being and not human being for the Sabbath," (Mark 2: 27).

Concentrated in the Sabbath is the cultural complex whole developed over the centuries and which makes Jewish religion distinct from other religions. It stands for Jewish piety. It

embodies Jewish spirituality. It is the law that regulates not only the religious life of the people but shaped their social and political life as a nation. The Sabbath with all that it stands for and with all that it means constitutes the syntax of Jewish religious culture. But what gives meaning and purpose to this culture is not the Sabbath itself but the people who live within that culture shaped by the Sabbath law. The question Jesus puts to his opponents makes this quite clear, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" For Jesus, the question was not whether the Sabbath was good in itself, but what it did to the men and women who lived in that religious culture.

According to Song, a question such as this that engaged Jesus during his mission led to the production of a powerfully creative theology. Its creativeness comes from the fact that Jesus' questions were directed to his own culture "not in comparison with other belief systems, not in terms of its own merits, but in relation to what it means for human beings." And by directing his theological enquiry into questions relating to the welfare and destiny of people within his own culture, Jesus' theology has no alternative but to face the "issues of love, justice, freedom and power," all of which are basic elements of the culture of the kingdom of God.

Now as far as an Asian Christian theology of culture is concerned, Song claims that this is not only possible but it can also be creative only if Asian Christians themselves are

43 See, Mark 3: 4; c.f. Mt. 12: 9-14; Lk. 6: 6-11.
44 "Dragon, Garuda and Christian Theology," p. 38.
ready to affirm and to identify with their cultures. This means involvement in the human struggle of the people of Asia for the fulfilment of life in this world and in the love and compassion of God the Creator and Saviour.45 This also means asking different questions from those that have been emphasized by traditional theology and "foreign mission theology." Instead of dealing with how the Christian gospel judges Asian cultures, the question ought to be directed at how human beings, entitled to love, freedom and justice fare in Asian cultures? What has a culture in Asia done and what does it continue to do to its people? Is it oppressive or liberating? Does it help create a space for freedom in the life of people or does it deprive them of that space? Is it a culture that allows no justice for the powerless and the marginalized?

C. Theology of Culture.

Song's theological enquiry leads him to the recognition of suffering as the matrix of culture.46 By directing questions to his own culture in relation to human beings, he is led to the conclusion that suffering constitutes the grammar, syntax and semantics of Asian cultures. What is characteristic of many countries in Asia is a "culture of

45 ibid., p. 40.

suffering within a culture of domination."47 It is a culture shaped by suffering and bitterness of life. What does Song mean by this expression?

1. Culture of Suffering.

Two important reasons account for this explanation of culture. First, the experience of suffering is something the majority of Asians have lived with for centuries.48 In the present moment, suffering in terms of poverty, injustice and exploitation is characteristic of the lot of many Asian countries.49 A statement of the Federation of the Asian Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference gives testimony to this fact. Song quotes it as saying, among other things, that,

most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor - poor, not so much in human values and qualities, and in human potential but poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves, deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic, and political structures which have injustice built into them.50

The Indian economist C. K. Kurien also confirms this reality in his analysis of the Indian economic situation. He

47 TWA, pp. 71, 74, 77.

48 TCG, p. 163. No doubt, Song has in mind the experience of many Asian countries under feudal and caste systems of ancient times, the agony and pain caused by wars such as those of Indo-China in modern times, as well as the suffering brought about by colonial domination and neo-colonialism. c.f. TCG, pp. 245-8; TET, p. 159.


50 ibid., pp. 172-3.
states that,

the most striking phenomenon is the dire poverty of the many millions in our land. ... On the basis of nutritional criteria ... an average Indian requires goods and services worth Rs 20 a month to have a physiologically determined minimum level of living. And it was reckoned that close to 50% of our population lived below even this very modest figure. 51

As to the human factors contributing to this intolerable situation, Kurien gives us a clue when he adds:

Inequalities of income and wealth are common in most parts of the world, but where the vast majority of the people live in rock bottom poverty the concentration of economic resources in the hands of a few at the top gives rise to special problems. The concentration of economic resources in India is in fact glaring. 52

Now the extraordinary situation of human existence in India which Kurien relates and which Song himself describes as an "ocean of poverty" 53 highlights the reality of this "culture of suffering under a culture of domination" in the life of Asian people. 54

52 ibid., p. 53.
54 This is also reflected in the words of the Indian Minister of Economy and Industry, George Fernandes, in a speech made to the Faith and Order Commission at its triennial meeting held in Bangalore in 1978. Song quotes him to have said:

"Little islands, little islets of affluence in this huge ocean called India, an ocean of poverty ... This is not a battle of 'isms; this is not a battle of the East and the West. But there are contradictions, the primary contradiction being between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots, between the five-star hotel and the slum. This is the fundamental and primary contradiction where one man's hope of making a faster buck is the other man's despair of being forever condemned to live a life of poverty. And
Secondly, suffering is a fundamental tenet of Buddhist belief. To a Buddhist adherent, life is essentially suffering. To realize that suffering constitutes the essence of the realities of life and the world is to be initiated into the process of attaining enlightenment (salvation). This is summed up in the so-called Four Noble Truths. According to the Buddha,

They are the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering, and the Noble Path that leads to the Extinction of Suffering.\(^{55}\)

Suffering is therefore part of the Buddhist' religious experience. Given the fact that Buddhism has captured the religious allegiance of a vast section of the Asian population, it is not hard to imagine how much this core of Buddhist belief has molded people's view of life and the world.

Song explains that for Asians, suffering is life and life is suffering. Suffering (dukkha) is never simply a mental state. Suffering is first and foremost a physical reality. It primarily has to do with the body, the stomach, the heart, the intestines. Asians do not have to look for suffering; it comes to them. They cannot choose one kind of suffering as against another kind of suffering; suffering chooses them. In short,

\[\text{this is the fight in which I am involved today as a member of the government. ... I do not want to see a situation where bread has to be denied again, which will take you to a point where freedom is also denied. And this is what one is trying to fight for ... And that is where I hope the world will also try to understand what we are going through.}^{*}\] ibid., p. 41.

for them "to be is to suffer."\textsuperscript{56}

That this is not an exaggeration on the part of Song is shown in the following words of an Indonesian Christian:

\begin{quote}
Asian people perceive suffering more as an integral part of being human ... never regard it as a strange experience external to life. We have to struggle against it, yes, but in the first instance we have to accept it as a part of ourselves. The struggle against suffering is, after all, an inner struggle against our own self.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Song therefore, in the light of the foregoing discussion, rightly sums up the cultures of Asia in terms of human suffering. The peculiar language of Asian cultures is a language of suffering. It is hardly surprising then that Song takes suffering as an important category for a theology of culture. Suffering provides an entry point into the ultimate questions of life and death, questions with which theology ought to deal.\textsuperscript{58}

Not only that, suffering provides a good point of contact by which dialogue with other religions may be established. In Buddhism, Song observes that there is in its central teaching regarding the Truth of the Extinction of Suffering, an explicit concern with the transhistorical. In other words, there is a strong pull away from the historical. Salvation which is realized in a transhistorical realm is achieved through the extinction of the historical. Theoretically then, Buddhism is by nature world-denying or existence-denying. This

\textsuperscript{56} TCG, p. 163.


\textsuperscript{58} TET, p. 123.
raises a problem for Song. Obviously, Buddhist faith and theology tends to put far more stress on salvation through merit than on salvation through grace. Song is critical of this for in his mind,

when the extinction of pain and suffering is conceived and practised in terms of a transition from the historical to the transhistorical, redemptive meaning is removed from pain and suffering. Thus we may suffer meritoriously, but we do not suffer redemptively.\(^{59}\)

Song argues that salvation (redemption) has as much to do with the historical as with the transhistorical. And once redemption is severed from the historical, suffering, considered primarily in terms of acquiring merits, loses its redemptive meaning.\(^{60}\) Suffering makes our history really historical. It makes our history truly contextual. It exhibits the saddest and ugliest in humanity, but it also calls forth the best and the strongest in us to create room in the space of pain and to strive for a new time of joy within the old time of mourning.\(^{61}\)

2. Theology of Culture as Theology of Suffering unto Hope.

In Song's observation, poverty, social inequality, and political injustice in many countries in Asia have cast doubt on traditional spiritual values. With emaciated bodies and empty spirits, life, for many is reduced to agony and

\(^{59}\) ibid., p. 53.

\(^{60}\) ibid., p. 54.

\(^{61}\) "Oh Jesus Here With Us," p. 29.
resignation. Even God, the ultimate reality, becomes for those overtaken by despair and fate, not the source of life, hope and light but a great unknown hidden behind an impenetrable veil of darkness.\footnote{TE TET, p. 27.} This experience of suffering has led to what Song calls "suffering unto despair." It is what prevails among people who are taught by centuries of tradition and culture to believe that it is their fate to suffer.\footnote{ibid., p. 172.}

Using this aspect of the Asian mind-set, Song proposes that suffering has a theological dimension. It has a redemptive meaning. This meaning is found in the power of hope.\footnote{Hope for Song is a spiritual force which can transform the negativity of suffering into an affirmation of life. Hope has power. c.f. TET, p. 158.} He calls this "suffering unto hope." It is a testimony to God's presence in human suffering. Song stresses that the power of hope can transform suffering into an affirmation of life. And this power is rooted in God's suffering love for the world. It is power rooted in God's powerlessness.\footnote{TET, pp. 162ff.}

In emphasizing this suffering aspect of the Gospel, Song is at the same time pointing to a weakness in traditional theology which in his mind contributed much to the failure of Christian mission in Asian lands. This involves the obsession with power that at one time dominated the rank and file of the church.\footnote{ibid., p. 160.} The power struggle between the Church and state in
the Western Church came to be reflected in her 'theology of glory,' a theology which emphasized the vengeance, might, powerfulness, and victory of God. During the missionary era, this western theology centred on the power of God was carried over to Asia in the form of "missionary militancy" as expressed in the use of so-called "gunboat diplomacy" as a means for the evangelization of the East. Justification of this use of military force in missionary endeavours is understood to be in accordance with God's plan of salvation.

According to Song, this overriding emphasis on power in both the theology and mission of the western Church does great injustice to the Biblical image of the Church as the humble and suffering servant. A theology which does not condone the wrong use of power is a gross misrepresentation of Jesus Christ who refuses earthly power and glory in fulfilment of his redemptive mission. It is a misleading theology because it leaves out an important dimension of the gospel, namely, the suffering God. The power of God cannot be understood

67 ibid., p. 161.

68 What Song is saying here is supported by Stuart Miller's statement that "few nineteenth century American missionaries found it strange that Christ's glad tidings should be introduced to China by the skirl of pipes, the staccato message of Gatling guns, and the roar of Hotchkiss cannon." Stuart Miller, "Ends and Means: Missionary Justification of Force in Nineteenth Century China," in The Missionary Enterprise in China and America, ed., John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 273.

69 See, Mt. 4: 8-10 and Luke 4: 5-8.
completely without reference to God's powerlessness. God is not just a victorious God but also a suffering God. The God whom we encounter in Jesus on the cross is, to use Moltmann's phrase, a "crucified God" - a God who carries within Godself the sting of death and human suffering. On the cross of Jesus we witness the complete identification of God with us human beings in our helplessness, suffering and even death.

For Song, the concept of identification serves as a replacement for the concept of vicarious suffering which traditional theology espoused. For, in his view, the God who is crucified on the cross is not so much the God who vicariously suffers and dies "for" the world as the God who suffers and dies "with" the world. In other words, the crucified God who identifies all the way with us in our suffering and death, "suffers with us and dies with us." The cross tells us that our suffering is God's suffering, our pain is God's pain, our despair God's despair and our death God's death. It tells us that in suffering or in death, namely in situations of utter despair and emptiness, human beings are not alone because the suffering God identifies totally with them. It is this suffering and powerless God obviously, then, not the God of power and victory, who is the God of hope for Asia.

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70 TET, p. 163.
72 TET, p. 165.
In God suffering and hope are closely linked. It is in suffering that God as the power of hope becomes most manifest. Song writes,

Suffering is where God and human beings meet ... Suffering brings us closer to God and God closer to us. Suffering, despite all its inhumanity and cruelty, paradoxically enables humans to long for humanity, find it, treasure it, and defend it with all their might.  

In other words, while suffering can eat away the meaning of life for human beings, it is in suffering also that we are grasped by the power of hope which is a redemptive power by virtue of the fact that it is rooted in God's suffering love for the world. The power that turns suffering into hope is a redeeming power because it is rooted in love. Where there is this power of love, there is the manifestation of God's redemption.

The faith that God's redemptive power is actively and personally involved in human suffering gives us the courage to suffer to the point of hope. That is to say, God's participation in human suffering because of love endows human beings with the courage to hope in spite of suffering. This courage to hope, which is given to us in Jesus Christ, is the power that enables us to create our future out of present suffering. It empowers us to see the shape of the kingdom of God in the transformation of society. It brings the future of God (our future) into the present. Suffering therefore has

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73 TCG, p. 115.
74 TET, p. 167. See also TWA, p. 76.
75 ibid., p. 169.
a creative and redemptive dimension.

Without this courage to hope there is no "courage to be," to use Tillich's famous expression. To be in the present despite all sufferings and hardships, one must draw strength from a hope that gives a vision of the future. To live in the midst of destructive powers, one must depend on the power of hope that brings the future into the present. That power of hope is no other than the God of Jesus, the same God who is present in Asia. Neither is God a distant God, unrelated to the present reality of suffering nor is He a God of despair. Rather God is the God of hope and as such God has the power to transform the suffering unto despair into suffering unto hope. It is therefore an important task of the church to play an active role in the transformation of "suffering unto despair ... into suffering unto hope." What does this involve?

In the Asian situation of suffering Christians must speak of hope and assist in efforts to liberate people from the tyranny of fate into the freedom of the God of hope. The Church must demonstrate both in word and action that God is indeed the power of hope. This must mean that it is the Church's job to make people aware that God does not condone social and political evil; that God does not accept suffering as the inevitable result of fate. It calls the church to a sincere recognition of the plight of the suffering and real identification with their cause. This means identifying situations of suffering and making people aware of their

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ibid., p. 172.
rights in such situations in order to equip them for an actual change of their lot.\textsuperscript{77} It also means helping people to organize themselves into a power to be reckoned with, under the power of hope of course, for the purpose of transforming society from fatalistic suffering unto despair into suffering unto hope.

3. Theology of Culture as "Story Theology."

As we have seen, Song conceives of culture in terms of people and all that has to do with human beings living in community. A theology of culture will then have to be a theology of the people. And since the culture of Asian people is essentially a culture of suffering, a Christian theology of culture will have to deal basically with this reality of people's everyday existence. Where is Jesus the Saviour in this context of human suffering? This is the most crucial question for theologians.

Efforts to wrestle with this question lead Song to see in people's stories what he calls "rhythms of passion" which echo the passion of God in people's sufferings and hopes.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77} ibid., p. 171.

\textsuperscript{78} Song writes, "Rhythms of creation are rhythms of passion. Rhythms of life are also rhythms of passion. Poetry without such rhythms is no poetry. It does not sing; it just mumbles. Painting without them is no painting. It does not paint life; it paints death. Music without them is no music. It makes no melody and tune; it just makes a noise. And theology without rhythms of passion is no theology at all, for how can theology still be theology when it has no human passion echoing God's passion?" See, TWA, p. 67ff.

As we have seen, Passion is a keyword in Song's theological reflection. For him, God's theology, which is
Thus he embarks on what he calls story-theology or "folk theology" - a theology which makes use of Asian folk tales, fairy stories, poems, songs, hymns, paintings, etc. as means for reflecting on the meaning of the Christian faith for Asia. This is developed in two main works: *Tell Us Our Names* and *Theology From the Womb of Asia*.

Song asserts that stories are not merely stories for the purpose of entertainment or recreation. Deeply embedded in stories is something about the culture and spirituality of a people. Portrayed in them are children, women and men puzzled by the mystery of the universe, bewildered by riddles of life, victimized by the injustices in the world and hard pressed by evil socio-political forces. These are stories of despair and hope, tales of doubt and faith, and accounts of the search for the moral power that will enable persons to live in the world. Stories therefore are "parables of human lives." As such, they provide a gateway to get to the heart of Asian spirituality, thus enabling us to see the response of Asians to the rhythms of love and hate, life and death and to hear the longing of the human spirit to find meaning, strength, and assurance in sources transcending this mundane world. At theology par excellence begins in God's heart (passion). Likewise Christian theology must be done with passion. A theology where the heart takes precedence over the mind inevitably becomes a "passionate" theology. It is this kind of theology which elicits a heart-to-heart communication between the faith of Christians and people of other faiths and cultures.

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79 TUN, p. 159.
80 ibid., Preface, p. ix.
81 ibid., p. 154.
the same time, by virtue of the fact that "God images God's own self in humanity,"\textsuperscript{82} stories enable us to discern where the love of the God-man is at work among human beings. They enable us "to catch a glimpse of the heart of God."\textsuperscript{83}

This is what story theology is all about. It is "people theology" or "popular theology." From a methodological perspective, the fundamental thing about this theology is that the people, the suffering masses, the undertrodden, the marginalized, are theo-logical beings. They are human beings with whom God dwells. God is in "the hearts of dumb millions" (Gandhi). This kind of theology presupposes that the revelation of God is in context. The "Word became flesh" means the Word is in flesh.\textsuperscript{84} And since stories are parables of human lives, they are part and parcel of the human context in which revelation takes place. They become the medium of God's revelation.

Story theology therefore is an attempt to express the Christian faith in terms of the rhythms of life and passion that emerge from the womb of Asian humanity. It seeks to identify the heartbeats of God in the heartbeats of Asian people.\textsuperscript{85} In the agony and pain of Asian people, story theology tries to feel, see, hear and respond to the God who suffers with people on the cross of Jesus. In the loves and hopes of Asian peoples, story theology tries to "image" and

\textsuperscript{82} TWA, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{83} ibid., p. 49, c.f. p. 54.
\textsuperscript{84} TUN, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid., p. 36.
experience the power of the redeeming love of God in the resurrected Christ. How is this worked out in practice?

Tell Us Our Names gives us the first fruits, so to speak, of Song's evolving story-theology. In this book, he uses folktales of China, Polynesia, Africa, two chapters from Alice in Wonderland and Jotham's fable (Judges 9: 7-15) as the basis of reflection upon the gospel message in relation to a number of concerns. Each of the ten chapters begins with a story or a folktale which provides the material for forceful statements relating to theological methodology, the ecumenical movement, Christian mission, dialogue with persons of other cultures and faiths, and political theology.

The title essay of the volume, for instance, is from an Angolan folktale which underscores the importance of names and name-giving in any culture. After relating this to the importance of name-giving in the Old and New Testaments, Song turns to the problem of name-learning for the Christian mission. He asserts that Christians must learn to take other cultures seriously on their own terms, for this is at the heart of the contextual and universal message of the Christian mission. How can one expect to minister to a people if (s)he does not even know their names? It is no wonder that

86 TWA, p. 46.

87 Song is here emphasizing the failure of Christian mission to recognize the importance of "knowing" the substance of other cultures in order to be able to faithfully and truthfully name the name of Jesus there. In cultures like Asia and Africa for example, names and name-giving have particular meanings. A name is not just the name of an individual. It is also the name of the family, of the tribe, of a people. Name-giving is not so much an exercise of power as performance of family duty. In Chinese society, name-knowing determines
Christian mission is being challenged in recent years with the request of people of other cultures to 'tell us our names.'

From Asia, the challenge is something like this.

Tell us whether you know something about Mo Ti or Gautama, and not always about Plato or Aristotle. Tell us if you know our history and what it means for us, and not always about your history and what it must also mean for us. And tell us whether you see and understand the struggles that have been going on for centuries in our body, heart and spirit, and not just unburden your concerns for our lost soul.\(^8\)

Implicit in this request is a note of criticism against Christian mission and its condescending attitude toward other cultures and histories. As we have already mentioned, this is the main reason for the revolt against Christianity in China. It was often not a revolt against Jesus but against the kind of Christian mission that tried to replace indigenous names with Christian names and substitute Christian cultural values for other cultural values.\(^9\)

Such mission strategy works with the assumption that God's name had to be introduced to Asia. But this is a mistake because God was already there in Asian cultures right from the beginning. "We Christians do not bring God to Asia." God

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\(^8\) TUN, p. 94.

\(^9\) ibid., p. 96.
precedes us in our mission efforts, so much so that it is not
us but Godself who is "reintroducing us Christians to our
Asian neighbours ..." 90 How? - through parables and stories
of human lives which testify to God's power at work in human
experience. 91 Song argues that Asian names embodied in
folktales and stories contain not only their own personal
story, cultural tradition and national history, but more
importantly the secret that God is with us, loves, us, suffers
with us and gives us hope for the future. Hence the more Asian
Christians know their own names then, the more they comprehend
God's work in the world.

It is imperative for Christians therefore to learn,
explore and familiarize themselves with their own native names
and the names of their own peoples in order to discover and
disclose the God of love who is present in them. 92 As they
get to know the names of Asians contained in their own
stories, they begin to hear sounds, see symbols and images,
grasp feelings and longings, that have been theirs since birth
and have never ceased being theirs even after they became
Christian.

A good example of this is Korea where Christians are
hearing the sound of "han" coming from the depth of Korean

90 ibid., p. 100.
91 TWA, p. 46.
92 This is where Christian mission in Asia should start.
Song calls it the "ABCs of mission theology." It is "getting
to know your name so well that your name becomes my name and
my name becomes your name," TUN, p. 100.
This experience of han or "unjustifiable suffering" is vividly expressed by the much tortured and much imprisoned Korean Roman Catholic poet and novelist, Kim Chi Ha. Song quotes him to say,

This peninsula is filled with the clamours of grieved ghosts. It is filled with the mourning noise of han of those who died from foreign invasion, wars, tyranny, rebellion, malignant diseases and starvation. I have wanted my poems to be the womb of the sounds, the transmitter of the han and of a sharp awareness of the historical tragedy.

The encouraging thing for Song is that Korean theologians have heard the sound of han, identified it with their own han and begun to wrestle with it in relation to the cross and resurrection.

In Theology from the Womb of Asia, Song shows through stories, poems, drama and songs from Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Kampuchea, Vietnam etc, that han and bitterness of life is not confined to Korea alone. It has been the overwhelming experience of Asians for ages. Yet the remarkable thing for Song is the realization that the faith that has kept hope alive among Asians has also been nourished within this culture of han.

Examination of story after story reveals that the han that has been brewing within Asian souls has a boiling point.

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93 For a description of this concept which is defined as "a feeling of unresolved resentment against unjustifiable suffering," see David Kwangsun Suh's "A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation," in Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History, ed., Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), pp. 15-37.

94 Quoted in TUN, p. 101.
At that point suffering can no longer be contained and quite often it breaks out into revolt and revolution. The power of han is then transformed into the power of revolution.

It cannot be denied that pent-up bitterness consumed with hate can be transformed into revolutionary power wreaking vengeance in fury and destruction. But when informed and rooted in passion (love), it can become a redemptive power. It can lead to changes which bring about the freedom of body and spirit which people yearn for. This is clearly demonstrated in the Old Testament stories of the suffering of the Israelites.

In the New Testament, we see that story expressed in concentrated form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In this person, we see the revolutionary power of suffering. But it is a revolution of a different kind. What is different is the revolutionary power of love which transforms bitterness into forgiveness and transfigures suffering and death into life.
CHAPTER 15: THEOLOGY AND POLITICS.

A. Problem: Polarization of God and Politics.

The question of the relationship between Church and State, or more exactly, between the Christian life and sociopolitical life has been a subject of much theological concern. Differences in opinions as to whether or not there is any intrinsic connection between the Church and politics has often created tension among Christians throughout the history of the Christian Church. In the West, the question has caused the Christian community to be divided into different camps under different labels such as, 'liberal' and 'conservative.' A polarization of the Church over this issue thus arises. With the introduction of Christianity to the non-Western world through Western mission, this polarized state of the Western churches was also carried over to other continents such as Africa, Asia and Oceania.

Song is concerned with this polarization of Christian mission because of the detrimental effects it has had on the mission and theology of the Asian Church. With the adoption and perpetuation of this polarization by Asian converts, what resulted was division and separation rather than unity and solidarity among the Asian Christian community. Thus the Christian church appears to have betrayed God's mission of

1 The famous exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees on the question of paying taxes to Caesar is a telling indication of the existence of this tension even before the beginning of the Christian movement in the first century. See, Mark 12: 15-17; c.f. Mt. 22: 15-22; Lk. 20: 20-26.
reconciliation and atonement to which she has been commissioned to carry to the "ends of the world."

Furthermore, bound up with this polarization of mission is an inevitable polarization of God Himself. God becomes the God of the Church and not the God of society. To illustrate the point, Song quotes a comment by Canon Max Warren regarding the problem created by Western mission in the case of Africa:

The God of the Church: He is not the God of politics - so, apparently they have learned Christ, these Africans, and discovered in Him not integration but divorce, not atonement but separation. A great gulf is fixed between the scripture lesson and education for career, between what happens in the church and "the high tumultuous lists of life."²

Song argues that such a polarization of God is unnecessary. For one thing, it sets up a dichotomy between the christian life and socio-political life which is false because it does not accord with the witness of the Bible. For another, to understand God in terms of the church alone and not in terms of society and politics is theologically untenable because it makes a caricature of God’s salvation.³

If the God of the Church has nothing to do with politics, how is the Church to carry out God’s mission of redemption and creation in the context of the political upheavals and social changes taking place in Asia? What does the love of God in Christ mean to Asian people suffering under the tyranny of exploitative and dehumanizing political powers and structures? How is the gospel of God’s love to make any creative impact

³ CMR, p. 42.
on Asians struggling for life in situations of political dictatorship and repressive regimes such as those found in Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, etc.? Such questions undergird Song's attempt at reconstructing political theology from an Asian perspective.

B. Towards an Asian Political Theology.

1. Incarnation: Framework of Political Theology.

There is no choice to be made between the God of politics and the God of the Church. Song asserts that the incarnation which forms the centre of the Christian faith means above all things that nothing that happens in human life and in the world here and now can be regarded as having no relationship with God. The incarnation of God in the man Jesus is a historical event. Hence Christian faith in Jesus Christ is a historical faith. In so far as Christian faith is a historical event, it is also a political event.  

Both the Church and human politics exist and function within history over which God is sovereign as creator and redeemer. It follows therefore that God can not otherwise but be involved in the political affairs of human beings. "The fact is that," Song states, "the God of politics is the God of the Church, that the God of the Church is the God of

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4 TET, p. 200.
politics."⁵ In other words, the God of history is a "political God."⁶

The Bible itself bears witness to the reality of God as a political God. The history of Israel as the Old Testament writers portray it is not just a religious history. It is also a political history.⁷ The beginning of that history is the event of the Exodus which marks the end of slavery and oppression of the Israelites. Israel’s liberation from the tyranny of the Egyptian rulers is seen to be due to the redeeming power of Yahweh.

In the prophetic tradition, God is shown to be continually involved in the political affairs of Israel. In the struggles of the people against the dehumanizing power of kings of Israel and Judah, God’s saving activity is seen to be carried out through the prophets. In the mission of people like Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc, which often takes place between temple and palace, kings and ruling elites are confronted in the name of God with demands to set the people free from exploitation and oppression. Thus Song sees the mission of the prophets as being both political and religious. It has to do not only with the order and worship within the

⁵ CMR, p. 42. God cannot be split up so to speak. History, after all, has to do with the political affairs of human beings. It deals with the rise and fall of empires and dynasties. It tells about endless efforts on the part of human beings to build their "city" or "polis" (Greek word from which the word politics is derived) and to make changes within this polis, pulling down an old polis and putting up a new one.

⁶ TET, p. 204.

⁷ The fact that Israel came to know Yahweh their God mainly through their historico-political involvement with other nations indicates this to be so.
religious community but also with love and justice in the socio-political order.

Interpreting the history of Israel in the light of the exodus event as well as the mission of the prophets, Song gains insight into God's political involvement with all peoples. God takes the historico-political affairs of our world with utmost seriousness. The fact that God engages in political action with the Israelites is an indication that political involvement is neither alien to the nature of God, nor is it inessential to the life of the community of faith.  

2. Song's Understanding of Politics.

Song understands the word 'political' in the broad sense of having to do with power. Being political is associated with being powerful. To speak of politics is to speak about the phenomenon of power. "The phenomena of politics," he writes, "whether of international, national or social nature, is [sic] the phenomena of power." Politics then is the manifestation, organization and mobilization of power for a certain definite purpose in the ordering of human society.

This understanding comes from looking at politics from the perspective of the doctrine of creation. It is derived from a reinterpretation of the biblical account of creation. Creation is the manifestation of divine power. God's creating power taking the form of Word and Spirit brings the whole

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8 ibid., p. 203.

9 CMR, p. 44.
creation into existence. And it is this same divine power which continues to become concretised into the ordering of the cosmos with all things and all beings in it. In this respect, Song views God's act of creation as a "political act."  

Song believes this way of understanding God as Creator is not only timely but important for a reconstruction of the mission of the Asian Church as well as her theology. Creation understood in terms of God's creative power can enable Asians to see that the Church's mission has to do with the politics of God and the politics of human beings. It will help them realize that since all political power vested in human beings is delegated power having its ultimate source in the power of God manifested in creation, ambiguity besets all human politics and the structures of power built around them. Thus the mission of the Church is to probe the structures of power exhibited in different situations and to direct critical questions to the use and forms of power in those situations in the light of the structure and dynamics of God.

Creation understood in terms of God's power can also help Asian Christians understand that a political theology does not

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10 ibid., p. 43.

11 This is so because the traditional use of words such as 'omnipotence,' 'omniscience' and the like to describe the Creator-God has, by and large, proven inadequate with regard to Asian understanding of the Christian faith and the events which serve to reveal the activity of God in their own histories. By treating the creation stories of the Bible as either literal, eye-witness accounts of how the universe came into being, or simply as myth or legend, Asian history was not seen to bear any relation to the revelation of God. ibid., p. 45.

12 ibid., p. 46.
have to deal with political systems, economic structures and social institutions merely as they are. Rather it has to deal first and foremost with the power on which these systems, structures and institutions are constructed. It seeks to confront this power with the message of the Gospel that power in the hands of human beings comes ultimately from God and that it must be exercised with due respect for truth, justice and love.\textsuperscript{13}


The political mission of God as carried out by the prophets also lends support to Song's understanding of politics. In his interpretation of the prophets, he finds that God's mission is almost always directed against what he calls the "barbarism of power" which the rulers of Israel and Judah committed against their own people.\textsuperscript{14} By this expression, Song wants to include all crimes of human injustices, oppression, exploitation, intimidation - political, economic, spiritual - committed by the powerful against the weak, poor and powerless. He writes:

\textsuperscript{13} TET, pp. 238-9.

\textsuperscript{14} 'Barbarism,' a Greek term of scorn for non-Greeks is found only once in the prophets (Ezekiel 21: 31) in the LXX. Song's usage of the term in reference to the O.T. is not meant to imply a superiority for N.T. use. The term is used simply to emphasize the crude, fierce and uncivilized use of power which is directly opposed to the will and purpose of God for humanity.
Oppressing the powerless and defenceless is political barbarism. Exploiting the poor is economic barbarism. Intimidating the dissenters into silence is spiritual barbarism.\[^{15}\]

It is against the barbaric use of power in the ordering of society that the prophets directed God's politics of justice, freedom and compassion. The prophets show that what God is intensely concerned with is humanity's social and political well-being. Since the ordering of society is based on justice, a distortion of justice is therefore a disturbance of the just ordering of the world created by God. The violation of justice is a sin against God.

For Song God's justice and socio-political justice cannot be separated. Because God is justice, God cannot allow the poor and the powerless to be oppressed. It is for this reason that the prophets are thrust into the struggle against kings and rulers who abuse their power to infringe upon God's justice and violate the people's rights. The famous encounter between King David and the prophet Nathan gives a dramatic illustration of how God's justice must be translated into socio-political justice. (2 Sam. 11-12). Another illustration is Jeremiah's condemnation of Jehoiakim, the despotic king of Judah.

In spite of their defencelessness, Nathan and Jeremiah dared to stand against a powerful tyrant and point out his sin against God's justice and his crime against the people's rights. (c.f. Jer. 22: 13-17). In both these cases, the prophets clearly stood on the side of a people victimized by

\[^{15}\] ibid., p. 204.
their brutal ruler. And in so doing, they became the voice of justice and the hope of God for a beleaguered nation. They become the representatives of what Song calls 'God’s politics.'


Christian political ethic is power ethic. Within Christian theocratic cultures of the world, a theistic view of power, derived mainly from St. Paul, has prevailed. All powers are traced back to God. Since God is all-good, it is also assumed that all derived powers will serve God’s purpose. But what if power does not serve God’s purpose? What of the power of the South Korean generals and the power held by the Nazi rulers during WW2? Such questions obviously cannot be answered satisfactorily with a theistic logic of power. Moreover, in view of the socio-political realities in which Christians seek to relate their faith in contemporary Asia, Song concludes that the power ethic founded on theocratic political culture is no longer adequate. A reorientation of

16 See below for exposition of this phrase.

17 Song claims that Christians in Asia tend to use the theistic logic of power as a handy tool to give support to passive or active attitudes toward state authorities. Many Christians think that inasmuch as all powers are instituted by God, their political duty is to obey and not to rebel. 'Political quietism' becomes for them not only a political necessity but a Christian virtue. On the other hand, there are activist Christians who want to take state authorities to task. They believe that the will of God as perceived by them must also be the political will of the rulers.

Song concedes that such a Christian theocratic ethic may still work in countries with political systems founded on christian principles. But in states such as the Soviet Union
political theology is thus necessary.

He suggests that Christians in Asia have to explore other dimensions of political ethics based on a different understanding of the origin and nature of power. Song finds in the book of Revelation, especially chapter thirteen, fresh insights into another dimension of power. The apocalyptic language of the seer points to the reality of another power that militates against God and people. This is the power of the "dragon" (Rev. 13: 2), the personification of the power of evil and the embodiment of what does not belong to God’s good creation. In Asia, Song recognizes the reality of the power of the dragon in its various forms. Totalitarianism

and China, governed by an entirely different ideology, in governments under the influence of a different religious ethos such as Burma and Indonesia and in regimes aligned with democratic nations in the West in order to maintain autocratic rule such as South Korea and Taiwan, a call for a good and righteous government from the theocratic background of Christian political ideals will not carry much weight. TUN, pp. 168ff.

18 ibid., pp. 171-2. The destructive power of the dragon is rampant in the world today, in various forms. In Asia, it comes firstly in the form of "beastly power" and violence exercised by sinister and ruthless rulers over their poor subjects. Second, a more subtle form is the so-called "economic prosperity" against which the success of a government is measured, often at the cost of deprecating human values and loss of basic human rights such as freedom. This is the dragon in sheep’s clothes depicted in the beast with "two horns like a lamb’s" (Rev. 13: 11). A third beastly form of dragon power is that of dictatorship or totalitarianism, found in one-party rule of countries like South Korea, China, the Philippines and Taiwan.

While the power of the dragon (evil) ravages havoc against God’s creation, bringing chaos, suffering, death and destruction to God’s people, God’s love (power) for all creation abounds even more. God in Jesus Christ has defeated the power of the dragon. Through the blood of the Lamb, God’s redeeming purpose for all peoples is fulfilled. In Jesus Christ God continues to recreate and reconstruct human life out of old ruins.
is identified as one such form. "What positive relationship does such totalitarian one-party rule have with God? The answer is: none." 19

Song's interpretation of the Bible leads him to a political ethic based on the "people" rather than the "ruler" as the locus of the power of God. He proposes that the power of God embodied in the people is a force that can bring about the renewal of a nation under the power politics of dictators and repressive governments. Here Song introduces a shift of basis in Christian political thought and action. It is a shift from a theocratic political culture to "democratic political culture." Why this shift? The following statement gives us a clue.

Theocracy is divine politics; democracy is people politics. Theocracy inculcates in rulers the fear of God; democracy inculcates in them fear of the people. Theocratic politics assumes that power need not fear the people; it fears God. In contrast, democratic politics stresses that power need not fear God; it fears the people." 20

The whole attempt is to reconstruct christian political ethic in order to make the truth of God meaningful and relevant to the experience of Asian people.

Song points out that the shift in the basis of power from God (theocracy) to the people (democracy) does not mean that this kind of political theology does not believe in God. Nor does it mean that this kind of power ethic has no faith in the power of God. Rather it seeks to bring God into the concrete experience of people. What it means is that God is not an

19 ibid., p. 172.
20 ibid., p. 173.
abstraction of theological thinkers, but a living reality in the midst of the people. God is not a theological proposition but the moving force of history. The shift thus attempts to locate God not in the Holy of Holies, but in the company of men, women and children toiling and struggling for the right to live as human beings. It seeks to give expression to the truth of Gospel, namely, "God of the people, God in the people, and God with the people." 21

The Gospel itself is the powerful witness to the God of people politics. The Song of Mary (Magnificat) embodies this people politics. 22 It was people politics that led Jesus to the cross. 23 Jesus' life and ministry which culminates on the cross on account of his love for people suffering under the tyranny of the power of the dragon thus gives legitimacy to people politics. This leads Song to speak of people politics as the politics of the cross.

21 ibid.,

22 A powerful people politics is embedded in Mary's words:
The arrogant of heart and mind God has put to rout,
He has brought down monarchs from their thrones,
but the humble have been lifted high.
The hungry He has satisfied with good things,
the rich sent empty away. (Luke 1: 15-53).

23 ibid., pp. 176-180; Song points out that Jesus in his struggle with the power politics of his day did not respond to the popular demand to lead the nation to political independence. Whatever the reasons were for Jesus not to heed the people's demand for an open revolution against the Roman authority, the fact that Jesus opted for the "politics of the cross" confirms it to be the "right politics" for Christians to follow. That is to say, the cross is where Christian political theology and the christian ethic of power ought to begin.
It is the cross therefore that forms the basis of christian political ethic. For Song, politics of the cross is the politics of God. The revolutionary power demonstrated by the politics of the cross is the effective power for the witness of the faith in Asia because it is the power of God. It is the power that indicts those who rule with greed and injustice. It is the power that gives new light and new hope. It is the power that keeps the vision of humanity directed to all that is good, true and beautiful.

C. The Politics of God.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central in Song's interpretation of the politics of God. The fact that the powerless cross transfigured by the resurrection turns into a powerful and creative force in the history of the world and the christian church leads Song to an understanding of God's politics in terms of the "reconstruction" or "transposition" of human powers. This is the idea inherent in the phrase "God's politics of the resurrection" which Song uses to describe the nature of God's political activity in the world.

God's politics of the resurrection is "messianic politics." Jesus Christ the suffering Messiah of God is the concentration of God's politics of the resurrection in the movement of history. In him, the meaning of the cross comes to a full disclosure in the resurrection. Jesus' death on the cross reveals to us the kind of politics that God practices with the world. "In Jesus Christ," Song writes, "we encounter the political God as the 'messianic politician'."25

Messianic politics firstly is politics of the cross, that is, politics of love. It is politics which is rooted in the compassion of God for the world manifested in the suffering and death of Jesus. God's politics, says Song, "was not a politics of the sword but politics of the cross and suffering."26 It is politics not of naked power or brute force but of suffering love. It is politics which uses neither violent means nor dependence on brute force for the ordering of the 'polis' but one that is guided and informed by God's compassion revealed in the suffering of the Messiah.

Such politics is certainly much more difficult than politics of the sword. Messianic politics is indeed difficult because it requires patience, self-discipline, and, above all, the power to love even in the face of hatred, injustice, humiliation and alienation. Yet, the fact that the power of

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24 TET, p. 243.

25 ibid., p. 223.

26 ibid., p. 228.
love defeated the power of the sword on the cross of Jesus shows that it is indeed much more powerful than brute force which seems to characterize much of the politics in Asia.

While messianic politics may appear to some to be irrelevant in the present world of power politics, Song asserts that the politics of love has certainly proven its worth over the past two thousand years of world history. He writes,

the powerless cross proves so powerful that throughout the centuries it has empowered countless persons to struggle for justice and freedom. In the name of the cross Christians give witness to the God of love and mercy in a world of hate and conflict.\(^27\)

Against the power politics of rulers and dictators, messianic politics has inspired a great many persons to struggle for peace, justice and freedom. Above all, it has inspired many people to believe in self-sacrifice as the most powerful weapon against self-serving political power. It has encouraged the use of non-violence, not just for tactical reasons but out of love, to carry the cause of the powerless and oppressed people to the court of rulers. A good demonstration of this kind of politics is Mahatma Gandhi. It was Gandhi's insistence on "the force which is born of truth and love" that finally brought about the political independence of his nation and people.\(^28\)

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\(^{27}\) TUN, p. 180, c.f. TET, p. 241.

\(^{28}\) In his struggle for social and political change under the power politics of British colonialism, Gandhi armed himself with only the power of suffering love expressed through the practice of ahimsa (non-violence). His political movement (Satyagraha) was one that was rooted not in the power of the sword, but in 'love-force' and 'truth-force.' Gandhi,
Messianic politics of love is thus "big politics" compared to the "pettiness" of human politics based on the power of the sword.\textsuperscript{29} It is big politics because it lends itself to the creation of a just and healthy society where all people can live together in "liberty, fraternity and equality." It works towards the construction of justice and the restoration of wholeness in community. Without love and justice, politics whether practised by state or by religious authorities, can only be destructive: it destroys the best in humanity, plunders the noblest in human community and turns people into pawns in the ugly game of power struggle. Politics without love and justice, whether implemented by individuals or by a group, can only become an instrument of threat and oppression: it suppresses the voice of conscience, does away with dissidents and hears in a people's cry for justice a conspiracy to rebel and a plot to mutiny. Such is the character of "small" or "petty" politics.


\textsuperscript{29} Description of politics in quantitative terms such as "big," "small," or "petty" is derived from the politics of Communist China. In the late seventies, the Communist Party embarked on a new economic program known as the "Four Modernizations" (refer note 47) which it claimed to be the "Biggest Politics." It is in the light of this claim by the Chinese Communist Party officials that Song makes some critical remarks. For example: "Can the Four Modernizations be called 'the biggest politics' when people are regarded merely as instruments of state power? Is politics really 'big' when people cannot freely express their views? How can politics be called 'biggest' when it is carried out at the cost of the inalienable rights of the people to freedom and democracy? Where is the 'biggest politics' when there is no relationship of trust and justice between ruler and ruled?" (TCG, p. 229). Song argues that a politics that belittles the integrity of a people is a 'small' politics.
According to Song, such small politics is the case with the power politics of many Asian countries. The dictatorship and totalitarian rule of governments and individuals such as the Chinese Communist party since President Mao, President Park Chung Hee of South Korea, President Marcos of the Philippines, the Nationalist Party rule of Taiwan, the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, etc., are some examples Song employs to illustrate the brutal, ruthless and destructive nature of human politics when love and justice are ignored.

Secondly, messianic politics is politics based on the power of faith, hope and life created and sustained by the love of the resurrected Christ. It is politics beginning with infinitesimal signs of love and leads to the creation of hope which enables people to affirm life despite suffering and despair. Messianic politics as politics of hope enables people to see a positive meaning in history despite acts of atrocity and insanity. It is in the light of this messianic politics of God that Song interprets the action of the Korean Christians under the authoritarian rule of the Park regime. Christian faith and hope is expressed in an important document: "Theological Declaration of Korean Christians, 

30 TCG, pp. 216-227; See also, TWA, pp. 35-36; TUN, pp. 201f.
31 ibid., pp. 234-236; c.f. TUN, pp. 166 & 187.
32 ibid., p. 236; c.f. TWA, pp. 78-79, 92-95.
33 ibid., pp. 236-7; also TUN, pp. 202-3.
34 ibid., pp. 239, 246; also TWA, pp. 147, 181-182.
35 TET, p. 244.
As we have pointed out, Song understands the politics of God in terms of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The cross is the historical meaning of the resurrection just as the resurrection is the eschatological meaning of the cross. The cross, seen in the light of the resurrection, is a sign and symbol, expressing the hope as well as the suffering of people who long for liberation from the bondage of the body and the spirit. It stands for hope for a people in despair, for the future for those who see no way out of the present conditions of suffering, and for life for those who are threatened by death. The cross of the risen Christ is a declaration that God is at work with men and women who struggle to bring about a just and free society. It is above all the power of a loving God who is actively engaged with the world to realize the fulfilment of the purpose for which all things are created.

The resurrection is the "affirmation of the cross." It is in this sense that Song speaks of the "cross in the resurrection" and the "resurrection in the cross." Hope and life promised by God in the resurrection of Jesus is inherent

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36 For details, see Appendix 2.
37 For Song, the cross and the resurrection cannot be interpreted separately. The two must be interpreted together; "the resurrection must be experienced in and through the cross just as the cross must be seen in the light of the resurrection." ibid., p. 180.
38 ibid., p. 187.
39 ibid., p. 199.
40 ibid., p. 244.
in the suffering of the cross. The resurrection enables us to hear the echo of victory in the pain and suffering of the cross. As the victory of life over death, it vindicates all pain and agony of history.

Resurrection means that God in Jesus Christ relates Godself to history and is active in it creatively and redemptively. To see history, be it the history of individuals, nations, or the world in the light of Jesus Christ is to see it eschatologically. That is to say, in all human struggles for love, truth and justice, something decisive has taken place, no matter how infinitesimal that something might be. Each tear shed, every sacrifice made, each and every effort toward the transformation of power that enslaves and dehumanizes people become decisive events in the lives and in the history of humanity's progression toward its fulfilment in God.

Resurrection is the affirmation that the final victory is on God's side. The cry of victory on the cross is a declaration that even as the battle is being fought, we can count on God as the victor. The resurrection therefore is the proclamation of the triumph of life over death even as death seems to be wrecking God's work of redemption on the cross. It is a new beginning right in the midst of the old ruins. It is a promise of life even as an attack from the power of destruction is under way. And it points to a future of hope within our present of despair.

The story of one Chinese Christian serves to illustrate what Song sees as the "authentication" of this resurrection
hope in the context of radical changes affecting the political and national life of Asian nations today. The story is about the Christian mass of Father Hsia, a prisoner in a forced labour camp (Ching Ho) of Mao Tse Tung in the 1960s. Bao Ruo-Wang, a fellow prisoner released in 1962 tells about Father Hsia's mass as the "last experience" he had at Ching Ho. "As I looked down the embankment," Bao Ruo-Wang recalls,

I saw that he was just finishing up the mass in front of a mound of frozen earth which he had chosen as an altar. He was making the traditional gestures of priests all over the world. But his vestments here were ragged work clothes: the chalice, a chipped enamel mug; the wine, some improvised grapejuice; and the host, a bit of wo'tou he had saved from breakfast. I watched him for a moment and knew quite well it was the truest mass I would ever see.

For Song, the story of Father Hsia reflects the constant tension between the Communist ideology and Christian faith. It also shows that in the context of Communist China where religion is categorically rejected as a reactionary element obstructing the construction of a socialist nation, there is still evidence of Christian commitment to faith in Christ. There are still those who hold on to that hope actualized and at the same time symbolized in the event of Christmas, even in the face of imprisonment, oppression, hardship and threat of death.

Song calls this "apocalyptic faith and hope." It is the conviction that the vindication of God will happen at

42 ibid., p. 6.
43 ibid., p. 9.
God's own time just as God did vindicate the cross of Christ with the resurrection. Without this faith in God, it is not possible to derive any strength from secret Christian activities, to be sustained spiritually, if not physically, when one's life is being wasted in the process of torture, suffering and pain. Politics of the resurrection is thus politics of faith, hope and life.

Thirdly, politics of the resurrection is politics which recognizes the humanity of each individual and makes allowances for human freedom. Resurrection has to do with the birth of a new being and the emergence of a new life for the world to come as well as the present world. Song states,

Resurrection is essentially the power that forms and reforms, sustains and re-sustains, empowers and re-empowers those who are regarded as refuse, non-entities, or good-for-nothings.  

It is the power that enables slaves to become their own masters and fills empty hearts with hope in the future. Resurrection is the foretaste of a new world in which each and every human being will be free for God and for all creation. The experience of the resurrection is thus the experience of becoming truly free and truly human. Resurrection life is a life in which our human potentiality comes to its full expression. And a fully human life is the life that reflects the glory and pride of the image of God.

From this it follows that God's politics of the resurrection is a politics without fear. Hope of the resurrection conquers fear of the cross and overcomes the fear

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44 TET, p. 252.
of darkness and death which often immobilizes us and makes us less human by forcing us to act on the basis of the instinct for survival and self-protection. Such fear often corrupts human relationships, destroys human integrity, silences our conscience and compels us to be unfaithful to God in the face of imminent danger. But the power of resurrection enables us to face the world with equanimity and conviction. The fearless Jesus in front of Pilate demonstrates that the power of the resurrection already at work in him exposes the pettiness of all human powers. Hence politics of resurrection, since it is free from fear, is politics of freedom. The resurrection liberates us from the captivity of fear and leads us into the freedom of life.

Stories of individuals and groups - christian and others - engaged in the struggle for justice, freedom and democracy in countries under repressive and oppressive government serve to illustrate the reality of the freedom and hope of the resurrection in the experience of Asian peoples. One such story is that of three Chinese youths and their 20,000 word wall poster entitled "Democracy and the Rule of Law" which appeared in Canton in 1974. In this document, the three youths vent their dissatisfaction with the ruling elite over

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45 St. Paul before the powerful King Agrippa also expresses how the power of the resurrection removes fear and how the powers of this world come under the politics of God. Under the influence of the freedom of Christ Paul confronted the powers of Roman authorities fearlessly in the conviction that "nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8: 34ff.

46 See Appendix 1 for some parts of this document.
the question of the violation of human rights. By questioning the truth of party policies and constitutional stipulations regarding the people's democratic rights, the three youths were arrested and imprisoned. In simply voicing the aspiration for democracy which thousand other young Chinese have, they were accused of being "reactionary in the extreme!"

A similar story tells of Wei Ching-sheng, a thirty year old worker who posted on the Peking Democracy Wall, in 1978, an essay entitled, "The Fifth Modernization." 47 In this, Wei emphasized that China cannot attain the "Four Modernizations" without first achieving democracy. 48 For advocating democracy as the fundamental condition of China's modernization, Wei was branded a counter-revolutionary. Arrested and tried in a trial quite unlike any other in China in the last three decades, Wei was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment.

According to Song, the struggle to restore the freedom to be human as demonstrated in these two stories is something shared by millions of Chinese. And in spite of the setbacks and hardships endured by the powerless, the yearning of the

47 ibid., p. 227.

48 In the communique' of the Third Plenary Session of the eleventh Central Committee of the communist Party of China held in Peking in December 1978, it was decided that the party must set out to make China a great industrialized nation on a par with the United States and the Soviet Union. To do this, the emphasis of the Party's work and the attention of the people ought to shift to the achievement of socialist modernization. Four main areas were proposed: (1) agriculture, (2) industry, (3) national defense, (4) science and technology; hence the "Four Modernizations." No sooner had the party launched this new project than Wei's open advocacy of the Fifty Modernization appeared. ibid., p. 228.
human spirit for freedom has continued to manifest itself in other ways. While the three Cantonese youths may have been put behind bars by the ruling party, they nevertheless have inspired hope in the struggles of others like Wei. They have kindled the fire of democracy in the hearts of millions of Chinese people, young and old. Not only that, what they did has made the so called Democracy Wall in Peking become the symbol of freedom and human rights in post-Mao China. The Democracy Wall has come to stand for truth in the make-believe world of politics almost totally dictated by the party ideology.

These stories and many more like them serve, in Song's view, to demonstrate that God's politics of the resurrection is being carried out even in socialist countries. In them we catch a glimpse of God's mission to the Chinese people - a mission to fight for room where human beings can move about in freedom and mutual caring within a nation. In the Democracy Walls of China, we see signs of the hope that the risen Christ inspires in people.

In this respect, Song speaks of Jesus as God's "democracy wall" and "big-character poster" built with sweat and blood.49 Though this democracy wall appear to be fragile and weak, unable to defend poster writers when they are arrested or protect dissidents from imprisonment, it is nonetheless a mighty wall. The hope it engenders in people's minds and hearts empowers them with a vision of a tomorrow that promises

49 ibid., p. 231.
fulfilment because it is 'God's tomorrow.'

Fourthly, messianic politics, like the politics manifesting itself in the freedom of Christ, is the politics of openness to the future. Song writes,

the politics of God that moves from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life, and from the cross to the resurrection is a politics that creates the future in the present, that makes an opening at a dead end.

What Song is pointing to here is the liberation of human beings in history as well as the liberation of history itself by the power of the resurrection. That is to say, history is no longer something of the past only. Under the impact of the power of the risen Christ, history has now to do with the future in the present and also in the past. All that happens in history whether in the past or present becomes a part of the future of God. Under God's politics of the resurrection, all history is judged, redeemed and recreated anew.

Each time the politics of the resurrection breaks into the life of people and into the history of nations, a new history is born. This history is new because it is open to the future. Created and sustained by the truth, freedom, and love of God given to all peoples through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no longer is history just a record of the human past, it becomes a drama of God's creative and redemptive engagement with human beings. Because it has been molded by the power of God's creating and redeeming love, history becomes a history of hope where human beings have the confidence to look forward

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50 TWA, p. 109, See also, TCG, p. 227.

51 TET, p. 257.
to a living future. Together with the risen Christ, human beings become makers of a new history. They become "living extensions" of God's creating power which makes possible the transposition of human meanings, values and powers. 52

2. Transformation of Power:

As we have mentioned earlier, Song understands politics in terms of power. Politics is basically a power struggle among contending parties and the possession of power is therefore the chief concern of all human political activities. 53 We have also mentioned his contention that human politics, rooted in the struggle for power, is often an instrument of suppression, oppression and destruction. By way of contrast, God's politics is always directed toward the liberation of human communities from the powers that enslave them. It does not consist of attempts to seize power just for the sake of possessing power. The goal of God's politics is the "transposition" of power. It does not seek to rule and dominate but rather to effect what Song calls, following Bonhoeffer, a "metanoia of power." 54 That is to say, God's politics essentially have to do with the transformation of human politics by seeking to bring about a repentance (metanoia) of those in positions of power.

52 ibid., p. 259.

53 ibid., p. 222; also TUN, p. 166.

The life and ministry of Jesus as depicted in the gospels demonstrates this well. Song finds that the metanoia of power occupied a central place in everything Jesus said and did. His entire life was dedicated to the task of trying to bring about a transformation of power politics through the power of the kingdom of God. This is the kernel of his political action. Through the transposition of power he sought to translate God's politics into messianic politics.55

Jesus' parables, interpreted from the perspective of power enables Song to gain insight into the shape and nature of the politics of God. In the parable of the "Workers in the vineyard" (Matt. 20: 1-15), for instance, Jesus makes it clear that God's power has to do with God's goodness. It is the power of mercy, goodness and love that becomes evident in the demonstration of God's reign. God's kingdom is characterized as the power that does good, manifests mercy and embodies love. Furthermore, since the poor and the oppressed are deprived of the protection of the power possessed by the rich and the powerful, God's power of mercy and love will be at work in them to support and strengthen them.

55 TET, p. 223; There are remarkable similarities between Song's ideas about the messianic politics of God and the transposition of human politics and those of Paul Lehmann in his book, The Transfiguration of Politics, (London: SCM, 1975). These similarities seem to indicate that Song is indebted, to a considerable degree, to the latter. Furthermore, these similarities point us in the direction in which Song further develops some of Lehmann's insights, for example, the importance of democracy in the transfiguration of society.
The parable of the "wicked tenants in the vineyard" demonstrates for Song the radical nature of Jesus’ messianic politics inherited from the Old Testament prophets. The central question in the parable involves the identity of the "wicked tenants." Interpreted in the light of the 'Song of the Vineyard' (Isaiah 5: 1-7), Song concludes that Jesus is pointing to the religious and political leaders of his day. They practice injustice, exploit the powerless and violate the laws of God. They have betrayed the trust of God and destroyed the confidence of the people in their rule. Worst of all, they have completely betrayed the landlord by plotting to do away with the Son who has come in the name of God.

Now, by exposing the wickedness of the religious and political leaders, Jesus was not instigating a coup or preparing the people for a revolution. Rather, he was waging a moral war against the misuse of power and the abuse of privilege on their part. Jesus is in fact declaring, just as the prophets had declared centuries earlier that justice and truth are fundamental principles of God’s politics. And it is confrontation with this truth that leads to the transposition of power.

The confrontation between Pilate and Jesus (c.f. John 18: 33-38a) in Song’s interpretation, serves to demonstrate further the transposition of power which is achieved through Jesus as the embodiment of the truth of God. Pilate, the questioner and judge becomes the one who is questioned and judged. The power to question and to judge is dramatically

transposed from Pilate the judge to Jesus the prisoner. As St. John tells us, Pilate's question about the kingship of Jesus (18: 34 & 37) is now turned into a question about the truth Jesus represents, (18: 37-8).

Kingship for Jesus has to be established on the truth of God's creating and saving love, whereas kingship for Pilate is simply a matter of the relentless pursuit of power inspired by what Dorothee Solle calls "instrumental reason." For Jesus, the matter of kingship was secondary, especially when it came to the kingship of this world. His primary concern was the truth to which he had come to bear witness. What is the truth of God? It is that God is love, justice and freedom. This truth of God has power to liberate the world from bondage of sin and set people free for God and for one another. It is thus the truth of salvation.

It is therefore the responsibility of those who believe in the truth and justice of God to be vigilant observers of the right use of power. For Christians, the power of God's truth given to them through Jesus Christ becomes their power

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57 Commenting on the civil war in Biafra, Nigeria, Solle speaks of the tragedy of the war as the tragedy of the "instrumental reason" that subjected the lives of people to the tyranny of political and economic competition. By this phrase, Solle means "reason that is no longer concerned with goals and final objectives, but only with the best rational methods." Political Theology, translated by John Shelley, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. 78. It is reason detached from concern for the whole person, the whole society and the future of the whole nation. It pursues its objectives regardless of moral considerations. A political struggle is often the struggle of such an instrumental reason. Immediate political and economic gains become the chief focus of contention.

58 TET, p. 240.
to judge abuses of power by those in positions of political authority. It is this power of God's truth which enables Christians to bring about a repentance, or transformation of power of those in authority.


The politics of God is never destructive. The political God to whom the biblical writers bear witness and to whom Christians owe their ultimate loyalty is a constructive God; a God of construction and not destruction. The suffering of Jesus on the cross transformed by the risen Christ into the power of hope and new life demonstrates that God can create strength and power out of weakness and powerlessness. God as creator means that God is ever creating and recreating things anew. God redeems and re-redeems, constructs and reconstructs.

The political activity of God is therefore always positive because it is directed to the creation of new human relationships, the redemption of the cosmic order and the construction of new creatures. This is what Song calls God's "politics of construction." One of the dramatic examples of this is found in Second Isaiah. Against the despair of the Israelites in exile, God through the prophet delivers a message of comfort.\(^{59}\) Such a message of comfort is definitely

\(^{59}\) See Isaiah 40: 1-2,
Comfort, comfort my people;
- it is the voice of God;
speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her this,
that she has fulfilled her term of bondage,
that her penalty is paid;
she has received at the Lord's hand
aimed at the reconstruction of a down-hearted people.

Typically, the politics of God working in the history of Israel is the politics of God’s redemptive love in construction and reconstruction. The Exile—a national calamity that brought shame, destruction and despair to the people of Israel—was after all a part of God’s constructive work with them. In Jesus Christ, we see the concrete manifestation of God’s creative and constructive power. Out of the suffering of the cross, a new creation comes into being in the power of the resurrection.

God’s creative power continues to be manifested in the world today. In the history of Asian nations, despite the injustices, oppression, dehumanization and hardships people suffer under the power politics of dictators, despotic rulers and governments, God has continued to work for the reconstruction of humanity’s well-being. In an article entitled "God’s Politics of Construction," Song asserts that there are signs of God’s politics of construction taking place in the midst of what he calls China’s "politics of illusion" and "make-believe."  

He describes how the Nationalist Party of China fled to Taiwan and set up the Nationalist Government (Republic of China) after having been defeated by the Communist Party. Two claims formed the basis of international and domestic policies of the Nationalist Government: (1) that it was the sole double measure for all her sins.

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legitimate government of China, and (2) that it was its sacred duty to liberate the mainland from the Communists. As time went on and nothing came of these claims, people's hopes began to fade. Realizing that they have lived under an illusion, people saw a need for changes in the political path for the future. Yet in spite of the people's yearnings, the government relentlessly held on to their claims.

International events in the 1970s seen as a threat to the political future of Taiwan caused panic and confusion among the population. Unable to maintain their silence any more, the people decided to speak out for themselves and not to let government and party officials continue to speak for them. In 1971, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan became the voice of the people when it issued a "Public Statement on our National Fate." The document appealed to the unity of all the people on Taiwan regardless of their origin. It affirmed the desire of the people to live in peace, freedom and justice. It claimed the right of self-determination, rejecting any attempts on the part of foreign powers to take over Taiwan. Part of the document reads:

We oppose any powerful nation disregarding the rights and wishes of fifteen million people and making unilateral decisions to their own advantage, because God has ordained and the United Nations Charter has affirmed that every people has the right to determine its own destiny.  

61 ibid., p. 73.

62 Quoted ibid., p. 74.
A second public statement by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan - "A Declaration on Human Rights," - was published in 1977. Prompted by the stubborn refusal of the Nationalist Government to change its policies, the declaration made it clear that self-determination was the right of the people of Taiwan which could neither be ignored nor taken away without serious consequences. Boldly, the declaration concluded with a call for political independence.

In order to achieve our goal of independence and freedom for the people of Taiwan in this critical international situation, we urge our government to face reality and to take effective measures whereby Taiwan may become a new and independent country.  

According to Song, the action of the Presbyterian Church in this critical moment of the political history of Taiwan is a witness to the presence of God in the struggle of people for freedom and human dignity which is theirs by right in virtue of the image of God in them. By joining in this political struggle, the Church becomes a sign and symbol of God's redeeming activity in the world. "What we have seen here," Song says, "is God's politics of construction at work through the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan." The Church's involvement in charting the political destiny of the people based on the dynamics of God's politics - freedom - means that Christians are participating in God's constructive activity directed toward the liberation and renewal of broken humanity.

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63 Quoted ibid., p. 75.
64 Ibid., p. 75.
D. Political Theology as People Theology - A Parable.

Song's political theology which we have examined so far is given initially in parabolic form in The Tears of Lady Meng (A parable of people's political theology). The title of the book is taken from an ancient Chinese folktale about human suffering and greed in the construction of the Great Wall which Song adopts and out of which he draws startling insights about the way of Jesus in the Asian experience.

The book comprises two quite different parts. The first is a simple, spacious and amply illustrated rendering of the ancient tale while the second is an interpretive recapitulation marked by clear historical explanation and bold contemporary hermeneutic. Song develops from this pithy tale a "political ethic of the cross of Jesus." 66

The folktale is firstly one of idolatry; the Emperor worships a God called "National Security." 67 In the name of this savage and insatiable god, human lives are sacrificed in countless numbers. In the absolute dedication of the Emperor to the national defence of his land, human beings are made expendable. People become disposable as "so much grass and weeds." 68 According to Song, this is the dynamic of many repressive regimes in Asia today where "martial law court trials and ritual murders are committed on the altar of

65 See Appendix 3.
66 TOLM, p. 25.
67 ibid., p. 31.
68 ibid., p. 29.
national security, the supreme god.” 69

In reality, the idolatry of national security is the idolatry of power. The tale therefore uncovers this idolatry of power for what it is, that is, a cult securing the rulers while the people suffer. The cult of national security secures those in power—ruling parties, autocratic rulers, dictators—at the expense of the nation and ordinary people. What kind of "political theology" and "power ethic" can hope to confront such Titanism? This is an important question for Song.

Apparently, he is not alone in this concern. Many other Asian people are asking the same question, particularly in view of their real experiences in the political events of modern times. Experiences such as the tragedy of the Kwangju uprising in Korea in May 1980, the suppression of the Human Rights Day Rally in Taiwan in 1979, the suspension of the right of prisoners to challenge their detention under martial law rule in the Philippines, military presence at every level of government and big business in Indonesia, the massacre of students and civilians in the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 and the like. Not only Christian but Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, believers and non-believers alike are seeking for an answer. 70

As for Song, the answer lies in the womb of people’s experience where new life is brought forth in tears and then laughter. He writes,

69 ibid., p. 32.

70 ibid., p. 35.
Folktale political theology is conceived in the womb of people’s experience. In the darkness of that womb a new life is hatched in people’s tears and laughter; it struggles to grow in people’s hope and despair. When the time comes, it bursts open the depth of humanity and becomes part of the world of joy and pain.  

What Song is suggesting is a theology of the people or "folk political theology." That is, a political theology experientially rooted in the people’s tears and suffering and theologically founded on participation in God’s history of suffering people. A political theology of this kind will unmask the idolatry of power that is so prevalent in the world today and especially in Asia. Such a theology is deemed appropriate because this in fact is precisely the political theology of Jesus Christ himself. It is "the theology of living with people." But how can a "power ethic of living in Christ with people" overcome the dictators’ power? 

Song asserts that like Jesus and the Buddha, God is moved to tears in the tears of the people. The christian political response can thus no longer be towards a theocracy nor violent revolution. The well-springs of transformation are in the people’s tears of humiliation, oppression and misery; its dynamic comes from the priority of love over might as we dare to speak the truth to the oppressor. This is exactly what the folktale depicts. The immovable mighty Wall gives way to the tears of Lady Meng thus unearthing the bones of her husband. Tears having their source in love have the power to bring down the powerful Wall. Tears welling out of Lady Meng’s heart of 

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71 ibid., p. 29.
72 ibid., p. 30.
love leads her to confront the cruel Emperor with the truth. And it is this encounter with the truth which unearths political lies and brings about the transformation of power.

In subtle contrast to Latin American theologians of liberation, Song contrasts the mighty, powerful God of the Exodus; the God who vanguishes the Egyptian army, with the incarnating, vulnerable God of Jesus Christ. Love is moral power in weakness and the power ethic of love disarms the "power thatrapes."\(^73\) Love has the power to defeat the power that oppresses, impoverishes, humiliates and dehumanizes people. Thus Song can speak of the "survival of the unfittest."\(^74\)

This all sounds very noble, but can this "tearful truth" be politically effectual? Song is emphatic that Christ-like powerlessness can transform into a different mode of powerfulness. We are to encounter the powerful in the powerlessness of Christ, staking our lives on the claim that the powerful of the world cannot stand against the truth, and thus filling their ears with the tears and pain of the people’s history. In this way it is possible to participate in the "history of the cross and resurrection in Asia."\(^75\)

\(^73\) ibid., p. 49.
\(^74\) ibid., p. 56.
\(^75\) ibid., p. 65.

Examination of the political history of Israel and God's involvement in it which comes to full expression in the event of Jesus Christ enables Song to draw some important implications for the Christian life and the political responsibilities of the Christian community. For a start, Christians are political people in virtue of the fact that God is not apolitical. Simply by being members of this political world created by God, Christians already are political beings. It follows therefore that Christians have a political responsibility towards the welfare of their nation and the world. There is no question, Song asserts,

that an involvement in politics is both a right and a duty of responsible citizens. Christians who are citizens of this world and partners in God's politics of making all things new have no reason to give up their political rights or to avoid their political duties. For our God is a political God. 76

The concept that politics must be left in the hands of professional politicians and the ruling authorities must therefore be rejected as a fallacy. Since policies and the political behaviour of those in power directly affect the well-being of a people and their destiny, each person in a nation should be both the subject and object of political decisions and actions.

Second, the prophets' concern with God's justice and their vigilance against the wrong use of power suggests that the maintenance of justice in the political affairs and in

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76 ibid., p. 75.
power relations of human beings ought to be a main concern of the Christian Church also. It suggests that on the one hand, it is the task of Christians to make explicit the will and purpose of God in the powers of this world when they reflect the structure and dynamics of God's politics, that is to say, when they reflect the love and justice of God.

On the other hand, the church is called to maintain a prophetic role in relation to political powers that be. It is her responsibility not to keep quiet when the powers of this world have fallen short of the structure and dynamics of God.\textsuperscript{77} Not to do so in a situation of totalitarian and repressive politics would mean that the Church has failed to carry out her political duty as given by God. To put it in different words, "if the church has no message of justice to proclaim to a ruling authority that practises injustice toward its people, the church has opted out of the politics of God."\textsuperscript{78}

Thirdly, the political mission of the Old Testament prophets as we have seen is one directed at the barbaric use of power by those in positions of authority. As we have seen also, this mission was shared by Jesus himself in the context of his time. Therefore it must also be the political mission of the Church and all Christians. Essentially, what this mission entails is the transposition of power. This is not to

\textsuperscript{77} While the Church cannot be a partisan to any political power, she maintains creative tension with it in order that her prophetic vision is sharpened as events unfold themselves before her eye to shape the destiny of human beings. CMR, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{78} TET, p. 218.
be taken as suggesting that Song advocates political action to be insurrectional, subversive or rebellious. What he is getting at is Christian action which seeks to confront the politics of existing authority with the politics of God—with love, justice and truth—in order that constructive changes may result.

Song recognizes that Christians usually do not hold political power. Neither do they have the military or physical power to overcome the violent use of political power. Nevertheless, the power of God’s love given to them through Jesus Christ becomes their power to judge abuses of power by those in positions of political authority. In the context of Asia where the presence of repressive politics and dictatorship is a stark reality, Song suggests that Christian political action rooted in the politics of God must be "politics of repentance." This means that on the one hand, it must be a call to the rulers to repent of their sins or oppression and injustice. On the other hand, it is also a call to the people as a whole not to accept false security at the cost of freedom.

The politics of repentance must then become a politics of change. It is a demand for radical change in the structure of the governing power and its political behaviour. It is a change dictated by what is good and true for the people as a whole and not just for a handful of powerholders. It is a change that brings about a democratization of power. It is the politics of repentance and change that is at the same time a politics of comfort. For within the framework of this politics
of repentance and change, the restoration of humanity in accordance with the image of God becomes possible. Humanity becomes free again. Justice becomes a reality, and love becomes the way of sociopolitical life.\footnote{ibid., p. 218.}

Fourthly, in the light of God’s politics as demonstrated by the prophets’ involvement in Israel’s political history, Song asserts that "political disobedience" can be an essential form of service that a Christian community can render to its nation, particularly at a critical time.\footnote{ibid., p. 208.} Song makes this claim in view of the Asian Christian mentality which tends to regard obedience as the supreme virtue. Having been nurtured in such a social ethos and political tradition, Asian Christians quickly came to identify obedience to God with obedience to the political authorities.\footnote{Song relates that obedience, almost absolute obedience, is the foundation stone of traditional hierarchical Asian societies, particularly those of China and Japan. Obedience is the basis of social relations and the political order. Obedience is inherent in the concept of ‘filial piety’ which governs the order of family relationships and the preservation of the status quo. It is the basic principle governing the relationship between ruler and subjects. Protest against the ruler or the superior is not only an expression of disrespect but also a disturbance of the predetermined order of society and human relationships. Thus the authority of the ruler cannot be infringed upon with impunity.}

Song asserts that obedience to God is not necessarily identical with obedience to political authorities. Obedience as a religious virtue in relation to God, when applied uncritically to political authorities even when the latter are seen to be evil and destructive of human integrity is not true.
Christian obedience. Rather he calls it "submissive acquiescence," or merely obeying for the sake of obedience.\textsuperscript{82} Such "mere obedience" is incompatible with the truth of the Christian gospel.

Certainly Song's claim does seem to be in opposition to the Pauline view regarding obedience to authorities as the duty of Christians by virtue of the divine institution of authority. (Rom. 13). But in actual fact it is not. Following Barth, Song interprets Romans 13: 1-7 in connection with Paul's discussion of the problem of evil in Romans 12: 17-21.\textsuperscript{83} In the light of this latter passage, Song interprets Paul to be saying that if political authorities turn evil, then they must be defeated with good, that is, with truth, justice and love that comes from God, (cf. Romans 12: 21). Thus Song goes on to argue that criticism of existing authorities is a religious obligation as well as a political duty of all Christians.

Disobedience to the existing authorities can be seen to be in the service of God if it is an act that seeks to defeat evil with good. Moreover, in so far as an act of disobedience to an existing authority that has turned evil is an act of obedience to God, it ceases to be a purely political action. It becomes a confession of faith.\textsuperscript{84}


\textsuperscript{83} Song claims that these two passages should be taken together since they both relate to Paul's theology of authority. And to take Romans 13 by itself, as a proof text for submission to all kinds of authorities is an oversimplification of Pauline thought.

\textsuperscript{84} TET, pp. 211ff.
Fifthly, the political God of the Old Testament is a God who takes the side of the poor - those whose humanity is alienated by the rich and those in positions of power. For Song, this character of God is suggested by the OT prophets' attitude towards kings, rulers and leaders of Israel. In the words of Isaiah, God "has been a refuge to the poor and a refuge to the needy in his trouble" (Isaiah 25: 4). Jesus himself is even more unequivocal about God's taking the side of the poor. The story of the 'rich young man' illustrates this. Moreover, Jesus considers his mission as that of "preaching good news to the poor, ... proclaiming release to the captives ... setting free those who are oppressed," (Lk. 4: 18). It is therefore the political duty of Christians to assist God by joining the struggle of the poor and powerless for justice, freedom and human integrity.

For the Church not to take the side of the poor when a social or political situation demands it amounts to a betrayal of God. For this really means taking the side of the rich and the powerful, which from the standpoint of biblical faith is the wrong side. Here Song cites the experience of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) during World War II, as an example of a church taking the wrong side.

Under the pressure of a militarist government, the Kyodan found itself giving tacit, though unwilling, support to the war of aggression against China and the countries of Southeast Asia. Apart from a few exceptions, notably some leaders in

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86 ibid., p. 214ff.
the so-called non-church movement there was no resistance or open protest against what can be termed "the crime of the century" that Japanese imperialists committed against their fellow Asians.

Nevertheless, in 1967, the Kyodan made public its "Confession on the Responsibility of the United Church of Christ in Japan during World War II." And by confessing their error and asking for God's forgiveness, the Church is admitting to having taken the wrong side.

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87 This movement was also known as "non-churchism." First advocated by Kanzo Uchimura, it stresses the study of the Bible and can be called "biblical orthodoxy."
In the previous chapters, we examined Song's theology by way of a number of themes treated in relation to his quest to transpose theology or reconstruct theology in Asia. What we wish to do now is to consider the connection between that theological program and the concept of indigenous theology which is what concerns us mainly. The crucial question may be put as follows: How is Song's theological reflection on history, culture, politics, related to the question of indigenous theology? Or, what might be considered indigenous elements in Song's theology as reflected in his treatment of these themes?

There are certain aspects of Song's theological reflection on the Christian tradition which, in the view of this writer, are conducive to an indigenous theology. His articulation of the content of the Christian faith lends itself to the construction of what may be considered an indigenously Asian theology in virtue of the Asian flavour it brings to the interpretation of the Christian faith tradition. The interpretation of theological components such as God, Jesus Christ, Humanity, History, Salvation etc., using resources found in Asia - stories, symbols, images, values, suffering and so on - conveys a conscious effort to construct a theology which is fundamentally bound up with Asian peoples and their historical experiences.
A. Compassion: A Fundamental Element of Asian Spirituality.

It is in terms of love and compassion that Song tries to express the truth about the Creator-Redeemer God in whom Christians believe. Reflection on the biblical witness leads him to the conviction that compassion forms the essence of God. In dealing with creation (history), God’s love is translated to action in order to save humanity from the powers of darkness and destruction. The creation story of Genesis 1 is an eloquent testimony to this truth about God.

The story tells of how God responds to the pain and agony of suffering humanity. Because God is Love, God suffers a heartache whenever humanity is endangered by forces which seek to destroy its well-being. God’s heart suffers pain for people struggling against demonic powers in life and in history. This aching heart immediately moves God to action. And God’s active response out of love leads to the creation of something new. It leads to redemption.

Jesus Christ is this redemptive act of God for the sake of the world. In the man Jesus, the God who suffers pain and heartache because of love for humanity becomes incarnate. In Jesus Christ, the compassionate God shows total commitment to the suffering of this world. In Jesus’ suffering on the cross,

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1 Song asserts that in the light of the creative and redemptive activity of God to which the whole bible bears witness, the focus of the creation account (Gen. 1) is not so much on the powerful God conveyed by the so-called concept of creatio ex nihilo. Nor is it concerned about the immensity of evil and the powers of destruction which surround human existence. Rather the focus is on the personal ways in which God responds to the fear and predicament of a human community. TET, p. 37.
God identifies fully with the suffering of human beings. The cross is thus God’s suffering as well as the suffering of humanity.

In the cross of Jesus, God’s redeeming presence is revealed. On the cross God is present to combat the power of sin and darkness (death). The resurrection stands for the victory of God’s love over the power of death. In the risen Christ we see how God makes a new creation out of suffering (cross). In the resurrection of Jesus a new person comes into being. A new creation begins in the midst of the old creation.

For Song, the experience of this new creation is redemption. And for this reason, he is able to emphasize the suffering of God which is at the same time the redemption of the world. The God who suffers is the God who redeems. Or, to put it the other way round, the redeeming God is the suffering God. This is the meaning of the compassionate God. Compassion is wholehearted love with no strings attached. It is love which suffers with and for others. What is indigenous about Song’s expression of the essential nature of God in terms of compassion? I wish to make two observations here.

1. Compassion as an Asian Religious Value.

Compassion or love has universal meaning because it is a quality of being human. Thus the articulation of the christian truth about God in terms of compassion is relevant

\(^2\) ibid., p. 54.
not only for Asians but for people everywhere. But in our observation, Song's emphasis on the compassion of God is doubly relevant for the expression of the content of the christian faith in the Asian context for important reasons.

For one thing, this is precisely the kind of formulation of the gospel that could speak meaningfully to the Asian person in view of the immensity and reality of suffering in Asian existence. For another, compassion is considered an essential characteristic of the Asian cultural and/or religious ethos. Being "deeply embedded in the cultures of East Asia,"\(^3\) compassion is very much in the heart of Asian spirituality. It belongs to the core of Asian thought and life. This being the case, how much easier can one hope to express the Christian faith in a situation where Christianity is a minority than through the compassion that is part of heritage shared by all Asians?

According to Song, compassion is an indigenous element of Asian religions. The spirit of compassion has lain dormant in the heart of Asian cultures since ancient times. It is evident in the words and teachings, both secular and religious, of ancient sages like Confucius and Mencius. In Confucianist talk and practice of 'jen' (love; human-heartedness), in Hindu teaching and practice of 'ahimsa' (non-violence) and in the Buddhist struggle for the elimination of 'dukka' (suffering), the importance of compassion is unmistakable. Throughout history, this passionate spirit has come to the surface through the writings

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\(^3\) TWA, p. 170f.
(poems, prayers, songs, stories, folktales, etc.) as well as the actions of Asian people.

There is no doubt in Song's mind that the compassion which is at the centre of Christian belief about the action of God with humanity is a fundamental element in Asian religious thought and practice. Contrary to traditional Christian thinking which tends to regard other religions negatively believing that only Christians are capable of great deeds of love and noble expressions of virtue, Asian religions are themselves religions of compassion.4

In Buddhism especially, Song demonstrates the centrality of compassion in its teachings and practice. Besides offering hope of liberation from suffering, Buddhism preaches and practises love and compassion. This is particularly evident in the Mahayana form of Buddhism which, in contrast to the efforts of Christian mission, has captured the hearts of a comparatively larger section of the Asian population. Clearly, the main appeal for people is the compassion which the Buddha, acclaimed as a 'saviour being' shows toward suffering humanity. This compassion is expressed in the action of the Bodhisattva.5 It is also concretely expressed in the words

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4 ibid., p. 141.

5 Bodhisattvas are said to be monks and lay persons who have attained the highest form of enlightenment and reached the gate of nirvana but turn around and head for suffering humanity for its salvation. They have broken the chains of evil karma and have ceased to crave for the illusions of the senses that bedevil life. Through compassion, they have taken upon themselves the mission to guide their fellow human beings to the bliss of nirvana. Thus they remain in the realm of incarnation to save all conscious beings. See TCG, p. 189; TET, p. 135f.
and deeds of many Buddhist believers.

One such example is the self-sacrificial act of Nhat Chi Nai, a Buddhist nun who burned herself as a peace offering for her country during the Vietnam War. Let us listen to her words:

O Vietnam, Vietnam,
Why this hatred among people?
why this killing of one another?
who will be defeated?
Who will be the winner?

Oh please remove all labels!
we all are Vietnamese
we all are Vietnamese
let us take each others's hand
to protect our country.

O Vietnam, Vietnam.⁶

There is no doubt that these words are loaded with a deep compassion of one who shares in the agony of her people and one who can no longer remain passive about it. In Song's writing there are countless examples of this compassionate spirit contained in the words and deeds of Asians who have been inspired by the religious teachings and thoughts of the Buddha. And for this reason he is led to assert that "compassion ... is the heart of Buddhism."⁷ That is to say compassion is, in a real sense, indigenous to the Buddhist faith and for that matter Asia as a whole.

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⁶ Quoted in TWA, p. 150.
⁷ ibid., p. 156.
2. The Compassionate God through Asian Terms.

Secondly, in attempting to articulate the meaning of the compassionate God incarnate in the man Jesus, Song employs a number of Asian indigenous terms. There is first of all the Japanese word tsurasa which Kazo Kitamori describes as the "feeling of inevitable fate and sorrow that overhangs human life."\(^8\)

Following Kitamori's description, Song himself defines tsurasa as the "feeling of an aching void that makes us helpless and weak."\(^9\) Applied to God, tsurasa describes the experience of God in relation to the world. The tsurasa God becomes "helpless and weak" in the face of human indifference. In spite of seeming hopelessness, the tsurasa God painfully continues to win back humanity to Godself.

One of the predominant themes in the bible is that of Creator God searching painfully for lost creatures. The "Where are You?" (Genesis 3: 9) of God to Adam in the garden of Eden conveys this divine love which searches after the one who has betrayed that love. God's love which yearns and longs for the return of the loved ones lost is explicitly portrayed in the parable of the two sons (Lk. 15: 11-32). But it is no less explicit in the prophets, especially Hosea. (Hosea 11: 8-9; c.f. Isa. 22. 4; Jere. 3: 12-13).


\(^9\) TET, p. 63.
According to Song, God's love for lost humanity causes suffering, anguish and pain in God's heart. In the face of humanity's waywardness and disobedience, the tsurasa God waits patiently for human beings to return. In other words, on account of deep compassion for fallen humanity, the tsurasa God suffers and endures pain and agony of heart.

A second Japanese word employed to express the nature of God's love is one without an English equivalent — yarusenasa. According to Song, yarusenasa expresses a deep-seated longing without any hope of immediate fulfilment. It is like longing for something that is impossible to obtain. God's love is like this in that it continues to long for its partner despite all failures and disappointments. Thus the God of tsurasa is the God of yarusenasa. Against all odds, and even at the cost of great agony and pain, the tsurasa of the yarusenasa God keeps seeking for the loved ones. That is why, in the words of Hosea, God can neither "give up Ephraim" nor "surrender Israel." (11. 8).

A third word comes from the Chinese language. God pain-loves the world. In other words, the pain which God suffers on account of humanity is rooted in love. Such an expression of the love of God is not too difficult for the Chinese to grasp because in the Chinese language, there is a word which means both pain and love. In fact pain and love are customarily spoken in one breath with the word thun-ai (pain-love).

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10 ibid., p. 66.
11 ibid., p. 67.
Thus Song uses this word to describe the nature of God's love. The pain-love of God is the love which feels pain for its object. Like the experience of true love between mother and child, or between husband and wife, the intensity and immensity of God's love for creation generates pain within Godself. This pain-love comes to concrete manifestation in the suffering of Jesus. On the cross, we see the strength of that love in that God lets Godself bear the pain through the Son in order for the world to be reconciled with God.

A fourth word employed to describe the compassionate God is the word karuna which according to Song is the "heart of Buddhist spirituality." Karuna means pity or sympathy for those who suffer. But it is not just pity for some; it is rather "infinite pity for all." It is that which finds expression in "the great pitying vow of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to save all beings."\(^{12}\)

In some Buddhist sects pity or karuna is related to the "womb treasury (garbhadhatu, or garbhakosa-dhatu), the universal source from which all things are produced; the matrix, the embryo; likened to a womb in which all of a child is conceived. ... It is container and content; it covers and nourishes; and is the source of all supply."\(^{13}\) Karuna, understood in terms of ultimate source of being, is likened to a mother's womb in which a new life is silently created, nourished and empowered.

\(^{12}\) JCP, p. 118.

\(^{13}\) A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms, pp. 312a-b; Quoted in JCP, p. 119.
What reigns in the womb is silence. Dense silence fills every part of the womb. That silence is the silence of pity (karuna) engaged in the nourishment of the life in embryo. The silence that fills the womb embraces that life, gives it protection, empowers it and enables it to grow. In that silence the rhythms of that life reverberates, filling the mother with karuna for it. That silence will be broken when the womb completes its task, when the womb ejects that life out into the world. The cry of a new life that has struggled out of its mother’s womb declares that the profound silence in the womb is over, that pity (karuna) has fulfilled itself.

Karuna then (pity), understood in terms of this Buddhist image of a mother’s womb, serves to express for Song, the meaning of God’s love in relation to Jesus’ suffering on the cross and for that matter, all human suffering. Karuna gives expression to the reality of God’s involvement in the suffering of Jesus on the cross. In Song’s interpretation of Jesus’ cry of dereliction, karuna is seen to provide an answer to the question regarding God’s whereabouts during the crucifixion of Jesus.

In the bible, the creator God is perceived to be a "speaking God", a "listening God," and a "remembering God." God speaks and comforts those in need; God listens and hears the cries of the afflicted; God remembers every person and never forgets even those who dare to forget God. Yet during Jesus’ crucifixion, God appears to be completely silent. Jesus cry – "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me"? – is

14 JCP, pp. 103-111.
met with no response. The speaking, listening and remembering God suddenly becomes deaf and mute. Why?

The answer to this question is an eternal mystery. However, in the light of the resurrection faith, Song claims that God's silence during Jesus suffering on the cross is the silence of pity (karuna). It is the silence of the matrix, the womb, engaged in the creation of life and nourishment of it. In that silence of the womb, pity (karuna) struggles to empower the embryo of life for the day of fulfilment. That silence of God is like a womb enveloping Jesus on the cross, empowering him during the last moments of his life and nourishing him for the resurrection of a new life from the tomb. In fact, God's silence is not just like a womb; God's own self is that womb of silence into which Jesus enters. And in that most secure, warm, loving, powerful and creative womb, the crucified Jesus was already on his way to resurrection. On the cross therefore, Jesus is embraced in the karuna of God, the womb of silence out of which a new creation comes and a new life is born.

B. Asian Humanity.

The starting point of Song's theology, namely, Asian humanity, is the second factor which seems to lend itself to the construction of an indigenous theology. For Song since God acts concretely in historical situations, since the action of God's love takes place within the actual life situations of particular men and women, it follows that theologians cannot
begin anywhere else but where they are.\textsuperscript{15} Hence for a truly Asian theology to develop, Asian theologians must seek to put human questions to the realities encountered in the complexity of their own historical existence.

Such an Asian theology must somehow witness to God's agony in people's agony, express God's hope in people's hope, convey God's anguish in people's anguish. It must somehow demonstrate God's anger in people's anger and echo God's laughter in people's laughter.\textsuperscript{16} In short, it must witness to the love of the God-man in action within Asian humanity.

Such a claim begs a number of questions. For example: Does not this procedure seem like an identification of God with humanity (history)? Are we not witnessing in Song an implicit tendency toward the deification of humanity? Is not this a reduction of theology to a humanism such that human beings are made the measure of all things?

Recognition of this danger is reflected in a response by Maen Pongudom to a keynote address given by Song at the inaugural consultation of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, held at Kansai Seminar House, Kyoto, Japan, in 1987. While Pongudom is very much in support of Song's incarnational approach to theology, he voices a lingering fear concerning Song's preoccupation with human beings as his starting point. He asks the following question: "Is this not too much 'human being centred theology,' not too much a 'life-after-birth theology,' so that the theology of life

\textsuperscript{15} TET, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{16} TUN, p. 10.
after death has become insignificant?"  

Song is quite aware of the issue raised by these questions. But he argues that with the love of the "God-man" at the heart of theology, questions about God cannot be asked in separation from questions about human beings. As Jesus demonstrated in the parable of 'The Good Samaritan,' the crossroad of love between God and human beings is the neighbour.  

This suggests that theological questions are in reality anthropological questions. And by emphasizing humanity as the starting point of his theology is by no means a reduction of theology to humanism.

Song asserts that Christian humanism is "theo-logical humanism." It is a humanism based on the assertion of the Christian faith that God was in Christ redemptively engaged with human life. Evidently, this does not mean life in heaven but life here and now, on earth.  

It is not with God's life but with this human life of ours and its problems that theologians have to deal with really. It is not God but we human beings who are the problem for theology. What concerns both God and human beings basically is "problematic humanity" and thus the task of theology is to see how God makes this problematic less problematic.  

The 'Word become flesh' is not just a nice harmless theological formula. It declares

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18 TET, pp. 94-5.
19 TUN, p. 7.
20 ibid., p. 37.
where God's theological battle is to be joined and also where our human theological response is to take place. In any case, theology is in fact a "human theology." Inevitably, what is required of Christians is not theology for Godself, but theology for "us human beings." 21

Understandably Song's emphasis on Asian humanity as the starting point of theology follows directly from his incarnational perspective. But this does not seem to be all there is. In our observation, there is evidence to show that in taking humanity as the locus of theological reflection, Song is utilizing an indigenous category, namely, Chinese humanism, to express the truth of the gospel. 22 For example,

21 "New Frontiers of Theology in Asia," p. 20.

22 This is not to be taken to mean that humanism is something that is exclusive to the Chinese. Of course the long tradition of humanism in the West is a well established fact. But we refer here to humanism as being indigenous to China in the sense of its being an integral part of the Chinese make-up whereas in Western society it is not. A couple of examples may suffice to elaborate this.

Firstly, Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher, sage, and representative of Chinese humanism, is understood to have insisted on life here and now to be the subject matter of philosophical enquiry. That is, the good of humanity is regarded as the starting point of any enquiry into the nature of things. Song quotes him to have said, "If we are not able to serve man, how can we serve spiritual beings?" (Analects). Secondly, according to Song, the basic tenet of religious belief which prevails among the Chinese people, both the intellectuals and the masses is "essentially a religion of man." Thus the three cardinal happinesses for the Chinese person are: "Wealth, Children, and Long-life." ("The Role of Christology in the Christian Encounter with Eastern Religions," SEAJT, Vol. 5, no. 3 (January 1964), p. 20). Now, according to another Chinese philosopher, philosophy and religion are virtually inseparable in Chinese thought; one cannot be properly understood apart from the other. (Hu Shih, "Religion and Philosophy in Chinese History," in Symposium on Chinese Culture, ed., S. H. Chen Zen, (1931), p. 25). If this is so, then essentially, humanism certainly characterizes the philosophical and religious ethos of China. And in this respect, humanism can be said to be indigenous to China in a
in arguing for a type of Christian theology which takes a more wholistic view of life and history rather than a view which divides the world into a 'theological' and a 'secular' part as often was the case in traditional theology, Song suggests that Christians ought to take more seriously the "so-called humanistic approach of Chinese thinkers to the problems of life and the world," quoting the Chinese sage, Confucius, with favour.\(^23\) What seems apparent here is that Song wishes to affirm the humanism for which China is popularly known.\(^24\)

Obviously Song regards the Chinese humanistic outlook as an appropriate approach to the task of constructing a truly Asian theology. Since the humanistic disposition is indigenous to Chinese society, it serves as a good point of departure for a Christian theology with which Asian people can readily identify. Not only that, but for the purpose of religious dialogue, humanism serves as a good point of contact between Christianity and religions of the East. By using Chinese humanism as a means through which the Love of God in Christ is expressed, a deeper Christological experience and understanding is bound to result. This would in turn bring about a radical reorientation of Asian hearts and minds, which in Song's view, is absolutely necessary if Christianity is to way that cannot be said to be true for Western society.

\(^{23}\) TUN, p. 7.

grow on Asian soil.  


Already in the preceding chapters we have shown that Song puts much emphasis on the suffering of God with humanity manifested in the cross of Jesus. For him, emphasis on this suffering aspect of the Gospel can well serve to express the heart of the Christian faith to Asians because suffering is something that stands at the core of their everyday experience. Also, since suffering is something that is deeply rooted in the spirituality of Asian people, a theological formulation of the faith which utilizes this category would not only be ideal but more palatable to the Asian mind.

Song is convinced that root of all the misunderstandings between Christianity and other Asian religions is the christological question of the "person and work of the Christian Saviour Jesus Christ." ("The Role of Christology in the Christian Encounter with Eastern Religions," p. 15). In Hinduism for example, such articulate spokespersons as Radhakrishnan, Keshub Chandra Sen, Mahatma Gandhi, all reject the Christian claims to the divinity of Christ. Jesus Christ is a prophet, Yes. But Jesus Christ as the incarnate God, No. They cannot see how the universal could break into history and dwell in the midst of other particulars without being caught in the evil net of samsara. (ibid., p. 19). Song sees the basic problem in the dichotomy between the particular and the universal. In Hindu belief, every particular, theoretically speaking, is offered the possibility of becoming the Universal. But for the Universal to become particular is meaningless. It amounts to degeneration or relapse into the bondage of the particular. How then is it possible for Christians to say that the universal God assumed the particular in Jesus Christ in such a way that He is this particular by virtue of the universal? (ibid., p.18). In the light of this problem, Song believes that the most urgent task of Christian apologetics is that of directing its thought to the role of Christology in its encounter with non-christian religions. For unless this question is addressed with seriousness, no dialogue with other religions can ever be achieved.
It must be pointed out that Song does not suggest that suffering is something peculiar to Asians. Nor does he suggest that Asians treat suffering as a virtue. Suffering certainly has nothing virtuous about it. It consists of the pain that one feels in one's flesh and bones. It is an evil thing which, like sulphuric acid, destroys the beauty and grace of humanity. It is an evil force mobilized by a satanical power to stop the flow of time, to deprive the world of a future, and to take away hope from human beings. As such, suffering is no monopoly of Asian peoples. It is a powerful reality to whose destructive assault the whole world lies exposed.

Nevertheless, while suffering is a universal thing, "in Asia", Song asserts, "it has a particularly sinister and ugly face." That is to say, the power of suffering is felt much more acutely in Asia than anywhere else. That this is the case is testified to in a report of the Christian Conference of Asia which Song quotes:

More Asians are hungry, homeless, unemployed and illiterate than all the rest of the world put together. More men and women are despised, humiliated, cheated; more suffer the tyranny of governments and oppressive elites, and the fear and shame that tyranny brings, than all the rest of the world combined.  

Now if in the light of this statement hunger, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, despair, humiliation, alienation, oppression, tyranny and so on are greater in Asia than "all

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26 "Freedom of Christian Theology for Asian Cultures" p. 29.

the rest of the world combined," then surely it cannot be an overstatement to say that suffering is an essential characteristic of Asian existence. Indeed suffering can even be said to be truly indigenous to Asia in a way that cannot be said to be so for the rest of the world. Taken as such, what better way to reflect upon the faith and express its content than through the suffering experienced by people living on the Asian continent?

Human suffering raises questions about the meaning of life. Acute suffering as we know often breeds doubt and despair. When the body is emaciated with hard labour and malnutrition, when the spirit is exhausted by constant fear and uncertainty, then suffering turns life into a bundle of meaninglessness; it makes no sense any longer to live. Moreover, when senselessness and absurdity fill one's life and threaten one's existence, questions about God become inevitable. Where suffering is experienced by human beings in the "depths" of existence, a "crisis of faith" arises which becomes at the same time, a crisis of credibility for God.28

For Song, this crisis of faith makes it necessary for Asian believers to "engage God in controversy."29 Of crucial importance is the question of the whereabouts of the loving and merciful God in this situation of immense suffering. "Where is Jesus, the one who is said to come to save the world? Where is the Christ, the one anointed to redeem

28 JCP, p. 31.
29 ibid., p. 25.
humanity?"  

Attaining an answer to this question would subsequently lead to an answer to the question of who Jesus really is and eventually Godself.

In his book *Jesus the Crucified People*, Song offers a christology which focuses on Asian suffering as a theological perspective for articulating the Christian faith. He asserts that suffering has a positive meaning and plays an active role in God's saving work. Where there is human suffering, there also God in Jesus is found actively participating to recreate hope and life. Thus in the depths of suffering amongst Asian people, "Jesus is here with us!" Jesus is present among them, identifying fully with them in their pain and suffering. He is and will always remain in solidarity with them.

As to the question of the identity of Jesus, Song asserts that it is the people who point us in that direction. People are, for him, "clues to who the real Jesus is." Song argues that what Jesus has said and done is not comprehensible apart from men, women and children who suffer in body and spirit. Jesus comes into his own as the saviour and as the Christ as he becomes more and more deeply absorbed in the impacts of people. He writes:

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30 ibid., p. 2.

31 ibid., p. 12.
The real Jesus is the love of God that creates miracles of life in the world. He is the pain of God mingled with the pain of humanity. He is the hope of God that people manifest in the midst of despair. He is the eternal life of God that people live in spite of death. Jesus is, lives, and becomes real when people, with unflagging faith in God, engage each other to bring about a new world out of the ruins of the old world. The real Jesus is the light God's salvation that men, women, and children kindle in the darkness of hell. The real Jesus is that power of God's truth that people manifest in the face of the power of lies wielded by the powers and principalities of this world. Jesus is the story of such people. And being the story of such people, Jesus is the story of God.\(^\text{32}\)

It is people therefore who make Jesus really "real" in the experience of human beings everywhere.\(^\text{33}\) Not just people in an abstract sense but human beings in a particular historical place who are "oppressed, exploited, disadvantaged, and marginalized socially, politically, economically, culturally and also religiously."\(^\text{34}\) It is these suffering people who point us to who Jesus really is. And this is what Song means when he speaks of "Jesus as the story of the people."\(^\text{35}\)

Jesus is "people" in the sense that he lived and died "with" suffering people. In the loving Jesus we see people capable of loving each other. In Jesus who is in pain we perceive people in pain. In the angry Jesus we encounter the angry people. In the suffering Jesus we witness the suffering people. In Jesus crucified on the cross we behold the crucified people. "Jesus, in short, is the crucified people!

\(^{32}\) ibid., p. 14.

\(^{33}\) ibid., p. 217.


\(^{35}\) ibid., p. 14.
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Jesus means crucified people.\(^{36}\) The reverse is also true. In the people in pain and suffering, in the people tortured and put to death, we witness Jesus tortured and nailed to the cross. And in this Jesus and in such people we encounter the loving and suffering God.

D. Theology Through Asian Stories.

We have spoken of Song's understanding of stories as the social biographies of peoples. Stories tell of the experiences of men, women and children in suffering and in hope. At the same time, stories about human beings reveal something about the reality and activity of God in the world. Contained in stories is the experience of people in interaction with God.

Song sees in the stories of Asia, both Christian and non-Christian, the power of redemption which has its source in the God of Jesus. In the suffering of Asian human beings as these are embodied in stories, Song points to the God who identifies with people in their suffering and hope. He believes that through folktales and parables of human lives, we see something of the power of God's love at work in human experience. And by letting the stories of men, women and children who make and live histories in Asian countries speak to our theological minds, we may discover that God speaks to us in ways we have not known before and discloses to us thoughts about salvation for humankind - thoughts we have never suspected before.

\(^{36}\) ibid., p. 215.
Thus for Song, one of the ways by which Asians can reflect on the truth about the Christian God who loves them and suffers with them is through the medium of 'story.' It must be noted that story for Song comprises all kinds of literary forms which human beings use for communication purposes. Poetry, prose, letters, news stories, prayers, documents (personal, religious, political, etc.), historical annals, even advertisements are all included. All such stories relating to the life of individuals, of whole communities (ethnic, religious, economic etc.), of governments and nations are important theological resources for Song.

The theological conviction underlying this assertion is the solidarity between God and human beings. The biblical insight that human beings are created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1: 28) - or that "the Word became flesh" - suggests an inseparable bond existing between God and human beings. Inevitably, this means that God and people can only be properly understood in relation to one another.

The word "God" contains the word "people," and the word "people" implies the word "God." God is in the "definition" of people and people are in the "definition" of God. Human beings cannot be "defined" and described apart from God on the one hand, and on the other God cannot be "defined" and described with no relation to human beings. 37 For Song, God is not God without people, and people are not people without God. God is "God-with-people" and people are "people-with-God." 38 God is a naked, empty and meaningless word when unrelated to people. The reverse is also true.

37 ibid., p. 184.
38 ibid.,
By that reasoning, Song claims that there is theology already contained in peoples’ stories. Though some may argue that this is only theology at the popular level, it is nevertheless theology at its most unsophisticated yet at its most profound, at its simplest and yet at its deepest, at its most unadorned and yet at its most moving. Hence in Song’s theological discourses, he employs countless tales and folk stories from Asia to try and illuminate the reality of God’s presence in the midst of Asian humanity.

Characteristically, he would take a story and interpret it in the light of Christian truths based on the biblical heritage. With the aid of what he calls ‘constructive imagination,’ and a passion for humanity, he would draw out incisive theological insights about the way of Jesus among Asian people. A classic example of this mode of doing theology is the ‘Tears of Lady Meng’ which we looked at in the previous chapter. Obviously Song finds a deep resonance of the Christian gospel in the Asian literary tradition. However, this is no one-way street as the experience of people embedded in the folklore brings fresh questions to the biblical tradition.

Song’s use of stories to reflect on theological truths is certainly not a new way of doing theology. After all the truth about God’s love for the world is by and large mediated through the stories of the Bible. Old Testament stories recount the historical experiences of the Israelites; experiences in which their faith in a God who saves them is

39 TUN, p. 32.
rooted. Likewise New Testament stories contain the witness of early Christians to the same loving God whose saving power in history they experience in fullness in Jesus of Nazareth. In this respect, Song’s approach to the theological task through story has its model in the biblical writers themselves.

In this respect also, his theology cannot therefore warrant the label of being indigenous. However, we contend that what makes Song’s theology indigenously Asian is the specific orientation toward Asia represented by his characteristic use of Asian stories in the theological process of reflecting upon and expressing the content of the Christian faith.

Unlike traditional theology which usually takes the form of a treatise or doctrine or a theological system, Song’s theology is shaped into testimonies of Asian people in whose lives and actions one gains insight into the presence and redemptive activity of God with humanity. And in using such stories of Asian lives borne out of a history of suffering to express and illuminate biblical truths about God, Song’s theology does acquire an Asianness which I believe warrants it to be labelled indigenous. After all, what can be more indigenous than the Asian people themselves whose experiences embedded in their own life stories reflect the suffering of God in the crucified Jesus?
E. Asian Orientation.

Characteristic of Song's whole approach to the theological task is this specific orientation toward Asia which goes towards the making of an indigenous theology. His main goal, namely, transposing theology from a Western to an Asian key, makes this clear. It is reflected in the kinds of themes and issues deemed to be of great significance for immediate theological consideration. Also, it is evident in his emphases on Asian histories and peoples and the way he tries to bring the Asian experience to bear on the expression of the Christian faith. Certainly, this specific orientation toward Asia shapes the content and the style of his theological as well as his christological thought.

The significance of what Song calls 'Asian spirituality' for theology points to the importance of this Asian orientation in Song's own theological construction. Asian spirituality, considered in relation to Western spirituality which is 'christian' and 'eschatological,' is contrastingly Buddhist and cosmological. It is the worldview and ethos borne out of the cultural and religious heritage of Asian people. For Song, it is this spirituality from within which and to which theologians must address with the truth of the Christian faith.

Commitment to that particular spirituality demands that theological formulation must be done primarily from an Asian

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40 See Appendix 4 for detailed discussion of this important idea in Song's thinking.
perspective. This suggests that God has to be seen through Asian eyes not only in contrast to traditional Christian theology but also in recognition of the religious pluralism of Asia and the problems pertaining to its present life. Christian truths about God have to be related to the concrete realities of Asian existence.

It is incumbent on Asian theologians then to try and express the content of the Christian faith in a language that can be understood by people in that situation. Naturally, this would mean using categories of thought with which Asians are familiar. It means using indigenous resources for reflecting upon and articulating the faith. It also means addressing the critical theological issues facing Asian people and seeking for answers that are relevant for that particular situation.

In Song's theological writings discussed in the foregoing chapters, we have seen that he does attempt to do all these things. In his language, he is mindful of the grammar, syntax and semantics of the Asian language. Hence in attempting to express Christian truths about God, Jesus Christ and other components of the faith, he makes use of terms, symbols, images and concepts with which Asians are familiar. Terms such as tsurasa, yarusenasa, thun-ai, karuna, certainly makes the reality of God easier to understand. He uses the reality of suffering in the Asian experience to express the Christian truth about the suffering love of God (cross) which has redemptive power (resurrection) for human beings. Compassion, a fundamental element of Buddhist religion and Asian spirituality is used to bring out the central truth about the
Christian God who is involved with those suffering from poverty, exploitation, political injustices, etc.

We have noted that Song puts great emphasis on the histories of Asian people. Human beings and the events of their lives provide the focus for theological reflections. It is in the midst of Asian people that God is encountered. The reality of God's creation and redemption has to be discerned within Asian communities and historical events in the light of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. This is why a theologian in Song's view primarily has to be an interpreter of history or a theological historian.

In this role, Song recognizes the action of God among groups of people and Church bodies fighting to gain the rights to be free human beings within totalitarian countries. He sees the redeeming presence of God in human acts of love; in efforts to bring about changes for the betterment of human life, and in the hope for justice, peace and harmony within societies.

At the same time, he is able to see those problems confronting Asian people; problems which have not been adequately dealt with by traditional theology. Problems of human suffering, despair, exploitation, injustices caused by power politics, despotism, etc., are some examples. It is surely the role of Asian theologians to address these problems theologically.
A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

1. Indigenous Theology.

In our attempt to understand Koyama's and Song's theological writings in relation to the fundamental question of indigenous theology, it has been necessary to examine the concept of indigenous theology in itself. (Part I). Various aspects needing clarification have had to be given prior consideration in order to put things in perspective.

In examining the historical background of indigenous theology (Chapter 1), it was found that the concept of indigenous theology originated in the modern missionary movement of the Western Churches. Inherent in the word indigenization which the IMC adopted as a mission principle, the idea of an indigenous theology derived from the envisaged mission goal of discovering the "living indigenous church." Thus the nature of the indigenous church, as summed up in the 'three-self' formula has provided us with important clues to the nature and meaning of indigenous theology itself.¹

At the heart of it is the need to root the gospel in the soil of a given culture. It deals with the fundamental relationship between the Gospel in its western form and the

¹ Indigenization of the church in terms of structure, control and leadership (self-government), financial and human resources (self-support), growth, vitality and creativity (self-propagation) inevitably gives rise to the need for indigenization of theological expression of the faith.
younger churches' desire for self-expression. Indigenous theology aims at theological expressions of the faith that are worked out by people living in a particular cultural context (self-government), using available resources and methods (self-support) and depending on local creativity and vision for their nurture and vitality (self-propagation). The Asian trends of indigenization discussed in Chapter 2 have served to demonstrate this basic concern of indigenous theology.

Two motives have been implicit in the various attempts of Asian Christians to indigenize Christianity. First, there is a conscious attempt to break away from the western mould of theology which has governed mission interpretation and understanding of the faith. Second, there is the desire of the indigenous people to affirm their own cultural heritages.²

The various ways in which Asians tried to indigenize Christian theology have shed light on the task and purpose of indigenous theology. Indian Christians sought to interpret and express Christian truths through Hindu religious ideas and advaita vedantic philosophical concepts and categories of thought (Vedas, Brahman, sat, chit, ananda, yoga, etc). In view of the reality of plurality of Asian faiths some sought to interpret Christianity in terms of 'fulfilment' and 'dialogue.' Others took the experience of suffering, pain (Kitamori) and people's struggle (Korean minjung) for political and socio-economic liberation as a principle for

² As we saw, the indigenous church movements among Indian Christians arose partly in opposition to the 'adjective' form of the missionaries' church and partly out of the need for a positive appraisal of Indian culture in connection with the life and worship of the Church.
interpreting the Gospel from an Asian perspective. All these efforts indicate that the purpose of indigenous theology is to make the Christian faith meaningful and intelligible in a cultural context by expressing indigenous concepts and realities people can understand. The task of indigenous theology is to try and bring the Christian Gospel into direct relationship with the realities of Asian experience.

Chapter 3 focusses on some important issues involved in contemporary discussions of the concept of indigenous theology. The introduction of the term contextualization as a substitute for indigenization raises the question of the usefulness and necessity of indigenization as a theological terminology. It also raises the question of meaning as well as the legitimacy of indigenous theology as an approach to the Christian task of expressing the faith.

It was shown that both contextualization and indigenization are process words having to do basically with the cross-cultural communication and expression of the message of the Gospel. It was also shown that both processes have similar functions and share common objectives. Differences and distinctions between them could not be established with any degree of precision. For these reasons it was argued that there is no real ground for replacing indigenization with the newer term. Since the process of indigenization remains an open option, the possibility for an indigenous theology is certain.

In discussing the question of the meaning of indigenous theology, it was incumbent to examine how the concept has been
defined. Despite the wide variety of definitions there were common elements found with regard to the function of indigenous theology. These basic agreements were then used as a basis for our own proposals as to what an indigenous theology entails.

Regarding the question of the legitimacy of indigenous theology, we have shown that precedents for this approach are found in the biblical writers themselves. There are also precedents in the history of the Church. Calvin's 'accommodation' serves to illustrate that fact. Moreover, we have argued that the doctrine of incarnation provides the theological basis for validating indigenous theology.

There are inevitable problems of which anyone engaged in doing indigenous theology ought to beware. Two common dangers are discussed in Chapter 4. Syncretism is one. The tendency to put one's culture above the gospel is another. We have suggested that while one must acknowledge the danger of syncretism, the fear of it cannot condone the failure to attempt an indigenous formulation of the faith. Regarding the other problem, we have affirmed the position that every culture stands under the redemption and judgement of the Gospel.

The existence of these problems for indigenous theology inevitably calls for some criteria for judging whether or not a theology can be said to be 'christian.' In Chapter 4 we

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3 The insights drawn from M. M. Thomas' argument for a legitimate Christ-centred syncretism are considered to be of great value in this respect.
suggested ten criteria most of which have been adapted from Charles Taber’s proposals in the belief that he has gathered together what most others have suggested.


In our examination of the works of Koyama, it was found that his theological programme was essentially a theological ‘re-rooting’ of the Christian faith in the context of Asian histories. His objective was to anchor theology in the life of Asian people, that is, by starting from the local setting; from where people are. The task, as Koyama sees it, involved "an intelligent and spiritual reflection on history" in the light of the Word of God. Given the nature of Koyama’s programme we have suggested that Koyama is not really doing systematic theology but rather theologizing and reflection that utilizes powerful imagery and uses symbols to express the heart of the Gospel to Asians.

Koyama’s theology lays a particular stress on the historical dimension of the Christian faith. History, viewed as part of the experience of God as well as human beings constitutes the premise of theology. (Chapter 6). It provides the theological framework for reflection upon the biblical faith rooted in the Word of the cross. Thus the particularity of Asian histories, cultures, religions, etc. serves as the departure point for Koyama’s theological reflection on the

\[4\] This is how Koyama defines the essential task of theology. WBT, p. 106.
christian faith. He begins by raising questions and dealing with issues of real concern to Asians. He reflects on the brutality of war, destruction, idolatry, greed, the impact of technology on contemporary Asian society and so on. Issues relating to the experiences of neo-colonization and their impact on the Christian mission in Asia, Christian relations with people of other faiths, justice, peace etc. form the content of most of Koyama’s writings.

The impetus for Koyama’s emphasis on history has two main sources. The first is the biblical faith in God whose deep personal involvement with humanity in history is manifested in the crucifixion of Jesus. (Chapter 7). The crucified Christ expresses the loving and painful experience of God with human beings. This passionate God is acting in history creating things anew and giving hope for the future of humankind. God’s love offers possibilities for liberation and human redemption. It makes possible the healing of broken human relationships resulting from the destructive forces of evil manifested in wars, militarism, nuclearism, political and economic exploitation etc. It also enables him to expose the subtle essence and manifestations of idolatry and greed in the world.

A second source of Koyama’s emphasis on history is his personal experience of the destruction of his country as well as his missionary experience of Thai culture with its orientation towards nature rather than history. The primacy of nature over history is characteristic of the cosmological orientation of the Asian mind. This is so pervasive that it produces an apathetic attitude toward history and change.
Such an attitude is seen to be problematic because it undermines the historical foundation of the faith. It has negative effects on the mission of the church as well as christian attitudes towards people of other faiths. It also breeds among Asians an attitude of indifference towards historical questions of critical importance; questions of ethics and social existence.

The discussion of the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity (Chapter 8) and human greed (Chapter 9) revolves around this problem. In chapter 8 two sources of this anti-historical tendency are identified. The first is the Buddhist doctrine of "Conditional Arising" which teaches that in order to gain the spiritual imperturbability of Nirvana, one must free oneself from all the attachments of temporal, historical existence. The second is a cyclical view of time derived from and reinforced by the agrarian lifestyle of the majority of Asians.

In view of the Asian cosmological orientation, Koyama suggests how the Buddhist philosophy and lifestyle of detachment can season the Jewish and Christian religion of God’s attachment to humanity. In the face of the Buddhist ontology centred on the inevitability of decay, he points to the nomadic existence of the bible centred on the principle of possibility as a clue to the meaning of human existence in general. In an effort to reconcile two differing views of history - the Thai circular view and the biblical linear view - Koyama proposes the model of an ‘ascending spiral’ which combines them.
He confronts the tranquility ideal with the message of the wrath of God. He stresses the priority of understanding Buddhists rather than Buddhism. He experiments with the Hebrization of key Buddhist concepts such as dukkha (suffering, unsatisfactoriness), anicca (transitoriness, impermanence) and anatta (no self, no continuing identity). He advocates the use of neighbourological language in Christian mission and proclamation. For the practice of mission, he stresses self-denial as an appropriate principle because it represents the crucified mind of Christ. Besides it is a central ideal of the Asian ethos and religiosity.

The phenomenon of human greed is the focus of discussion in chapter 9. Koyama draws this concept from the language of Buddhism and uses it to bridge the differences between the cosmological world-view of Asia and the historical world-view of the Bible. The primary concern of Buddhism to eliminate greed is seen to correspond with the biblical concern for social justice and Christian discipleship. For this reason, Buddhism is seen to be 'historical' in a sense that is different from the sense in which Christianity is understood as a historical religion.

Greed is closely linked to idolatry. From the standpoint of greed, Koyama gives a critique of modern technological society. The subjugation of meaning to technological efficiency through greed is idolatrous. Idolatry is committed when through human greed technology becomes absolutized. Clear practical implications of this are given especially in his interpretation of the modern history of Japan with its
imperialism, westernization, emperor-worship, post-war democracy and economic prosperity.

3. C. S. Song: Incarnating the Word in Asian Flesh.

The centre of Christian faith for Song is Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Hence christology is basic to theology. Unfortunately, christological formulations have traditionally been so Western that Christ is often rejected by Asians along with outmoded Western culture. Therefore the proclamation of the gospel in Asia must begin with the reconstruction of theology. This is the direction of Song's theological efforts.

His proposed method - 'transpositional theology' - constitutes the essence of his theological programme. (Chapter 11). The main objective is to transpose theology from its western setting to Asia. It is an attempt to transpose the world of the biblical faith to the world of Asia so that Asian histories, cultures, religions and so on are put in direct relationship with the salvation wrought by God in Jesus Christ.

It was noted that Song does this by looking afresh at the doctrine of incarnation (creation and redemption). In the incarnation God's 'being' and 'act' are combined in the communion of God's love in Christ. The incarnation is the

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5 In the face of challenges posed by non-christians against the christological claims of Christianity, Song suggests that only such an understanding of God's action in Christ can play a constructive role in the midst of religions in which salvation is regarded as either an attainment of the
total identification of God with humanity (enfleshment, humanization, relativisation) for the latter's redemption. It is affirmation of creation by God. This means that the creator-redeemer God is not bound by any nation or culture but acts in the whole creation. It suggests also that the incarnation occurs whenever God enters the life of humanity in particular historical and cultural contexts. The incarnation of God in history therefore makes possible or necessitates a theological leap from Israel to Asia. (transposition).

A transposition of theology is intricately bound up with a reconstruction of Christian mission. (Chapter 12). Christian mission, fashioned after God's mission of incarnation, must be a mission of enfleshment; of self-emptying and servanthood. It is a mission of humanisation or self-denial; of the Church becoming what she is not in order to make visible God's love for the redemption of all human beings. Self-denial elicits a readiness for others. It creates an openness toward others and their needs. This in turn leads to a mission of healing which generates hope among human beings. In essence, Christian mission ought to seek to incarnate the Word in the flesh and blood of Asian humanity, making the whole life of the church a manifestation of the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ.

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Song's transpositional theology questions the western models of theology especially the salvation history paradigm and its implications for Asian histories. (Chapter 13). An incarnational model suggests that the understanding of God's salvation be freed from its traditional boundary represented by Heilsgechichte and set in the context of the universal acts and presence of God in all cultures and histories.

History in light of creation cannot be viewed as one entity identified as Christian. Rather, we face a world of historical pluralism in which God is the origin of each history. Unfolding of the mystery of God's dealings with humankind in different historical contexts happens in ways other than through the Heilsgechichte of the Judeo-Christian context. Christ is present in and through the Spirit in other historical contexts, opening up the possibility of men and women responding to God. Jesus Christ, not the Judeo-christian history, is the centre of God's salvation. He is the redemption of humanity.

The reconstruction of theology takes its cue from Christ the centre. The task of theology as Song suggests is to reflect on the love of God active in creation and redemption in particular historical contexts. This means interpreting history in order to discern the redeeming activity of God and to participate in its manifestation and incarnation in the life of Asian people. Thus Song interprets human events and

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6 Jesus Christ therefore "should be released from the captivity of the so-called Heilsgechichte and set in the process of history as the continuation of the work of creation." CMR, p. 35.
personalities in the histories of Asia and China in particular as manifesting the redeeming love of God that is 'symbolized' in the history of Israel.

Regarding his theology of cultures (Chapter 14), Song sees all cultures as being derived from the dynamic of God's creative activity for the salvation of humanity. No culture or religion (including Christianity) has sole access to the whole truth of God. The cultural task of Christian mission consists in "an effort to search for and appreciate different shapes which the cultural dynamic of creation takes in different cultural and historical contexts." Mission has the negative responsibility of bringing to light the distortion of God's love in cultures, and positively, "to fathom how this same love of God is reflected in the life and work of those

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7 The question of 'truth' has been a point of criticism against Song. Sawatzky suggests that Song's position represents a relativisation of the truth of God. The statement that "in and through Jesus Christ we believe we are given access to considerable degrees of God's truth ..." (CMR, pp. 28-9) suggests this. It implies a denial of Jesus Christ's capacity to impart the whole or at least adequate truth of a supra-cultural God to the world. Sheldon Sawatzky, "Review and Critique of C. S. Song's Theology of Mission," Taiwan Journal of Theology, no. 4 (March 1982), pp. 234-5. But Song does not deny the fullness of God revealed in Christ. The misinterpretation arises as a result of different conceptions of the word truth. As Song explains, 'Truth' is an abstraction, an empty concept with no corresponding reality. To say that 'Christ is the truth' is a propositional statement that makes no real sense except when it is described in terms of God's love in action. Truth for Song therefore means the "love of God embodied in Christ" in its fullness. C. S. Song, "United in the Freedom of Christ," NEAJT, no. 16 (March 1976), p. 20. In this interpretation of Truth, it would certainly be incompatible with the belief in the incarnation to say that the "love of God" revealed in Christ is not found in any other history but the Judeo-christian alone.

8 CMR, p. 28.
who live in different contexts of culture and ethos."

Culture as a conglomeration of all that pertains to the life of human beings has its own grammar, syntax, semantics and network of meanings which give it an essential character. In Asia, a culture of suffering unto despair exists. But by virtue of God's redeeming presence in the midst of Asian histories, transposition to a culture of suffering unto hope becomes a possibility. Stories as the social biographies of Asian people embody this culture of suffering. But these stories of suffering Asian humanity also point us to the pain-love and compassion of God which can transform human suffering and despair to hope and life.

Song's theology of culture presupposes the attempt to shift the traditional understanding of revelation from its Judeo-christian setting to the world of Asia. He recognizes Asian cultures as the context of God's revelation. In other words, revelation is not limited by Scripture but continues to take place in non-biblical cultures. Thus in the cultures of Asia, we gain a glimpse of the reality of God (truth, compassion, suffering, love, justice etc) manifested in fullness in Christ. Jesus is the story of 'crucified people.'

Chapter 15 deals with Song's theology of politics. In the broad sense of having to do with power, the act of creation is a political one - manifestation of divine power. God is thus a political God and the church is a political existence as part of the total political world. The mission of the

church is a political one as it probes into the nature of power structures exhibited in different situations, making explicit the purpose of God in the powers of this world when they reflect the love and justice of God and protesting when they fall short of their purpose.

Rooted in God’s messianic politics of love (cross and resurrection), Song attempts a shift from the biblical theocratic ethic of power based on the divine authority of rulers to a view of power based on the powerlessness of the cross rooted in the common people. The reason for this is to identify the living presence of God in the context of the Asian masses suffering from various forms of dictatorship.

Song uses events of history, people movements and the struggle for democracy in the history of Asian nations, particularly his own Taiwan, to interpret and identify the redemptive activity of God for the construction and transformation of Asian society. God’s constructive politics in Asia is manifested in the life of individuals and communities who dare to speak the truth of God’s love against oppressive rulers.

B. Koyama and Song: Basic Agreements & Similarities.

Koyama and Song have developed their own theologies in their particular national and cultural contexts, each largely independently of the other. To a remarkable degree, however, their dominant ideas coincide, overlap or reinforce each other. Each of the themes and emphases which we have
identified with one comes to expression also in the writings of the other.

Fundamentally, for example, Koyama shares the christological orientation noted in Song. Moreover, for Koyama as for Song it means not simply stress on the God-man, or theological consideration of the relation between humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus Christ, but rather emphasis on God’s identification of Godself with humankind.¹⁰

Linked with this christological orientation is an emphasis on Asian humanity and experience. The orientation of both Koyama and Song is self-consciously Asian. Both affirm what they have inherited as Asians. But this affirmation is not without a critical prophetic eye for what does not accord with the divine purpose for humanity. They see in their rich heritage a wealth of theological resources that can be brought to the service of the faith. Asian cultures, religions, histories, can all make a valuable and positive contribution to the understanding and expression of the love of God in Christ.

¹⁰ Interpreting John 1: 14 in relation to Buddhist concern for Nirvanic Silence, tranquillity and non-attachment, Koyama points out that christian faith affirms God’s decisive and irreversible attachment with humanity in Christ. The Thai word for love connotes attachment to things, persons, or supernatural beings. But this produces trouble and sorrow, whereas detachment leads to tranquillity and happiness. Likewise, the notion of good can be illustrated by clothing washed, ironed and folded neatly in a drawer. Don’t wear it, or it will get dirty! The good is the detached. WBT, p. 84. For Christian faith, however, love and goodness signify attachment, concern, involvement - willingness to get dirty. God freely attached Godself to humanity in the Word made flesh.
The orientation towards Asian humanity is apparent in all the themes discussed. In regard to mission, for instance, this is reflected in Koyama’s emphasis on the ‘neighbour’ — "whether he be Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, animist, Communist, nationalist, revolutionary, intellectual or uneducated" — in terms of whose reality the missionary ought to see the reality of God’s presence. It is also seen in Song’s emphasis on ‘humanization’ as the goal of Christian mission. In sum, he asserts, "salvation is humanization."

Another basic agreement between Koyama and Song is in their understandings of history and its role in the task of theology. Both view history in personal terms; as the sphere of God’s personal involvement with human beings. It is therefore the point of departure for theology. History rather than nature, as we have seen, is primary in Koyama’s theological attempts. However, the primacy of history does not mean that nature can be ignored. Song goes further than Koyama in seeing Asian history and culture as already embodying the Truth that is fully manifested in Christ. In other words, Asian history is the context in which God’s continuing revelation takes place.

12 CMR, p. 217.
13 This is evident in his retention of the Thai cyclical view (nature) by proposing the model of an ‘ascending spiral’ to combine it with the biblical linear view of history. For Koyama, we are part of, nurtured by, subject to, threatened and overwhelmed by nature. But humanity transcends it and part of his/her responsibility in history is to exercise dominion over nature, helping to recreate it so that it may become the work of human hands as well as God’s.
Although there is a subtle difference between Koyama’s programme of theological re-rooting and Song’s transpositional theology, there are remarkable similarities in the concerns, style and manner in which they try to achieve their purposes. Subscribing to the ‘Asian critical principle’ both want to restate the substance of the Gospel in appropriate ways such that its message becomes a living force making pathways into the heart of Asian spirituality. Both want to forge an Asian Christian identity by responding primarily to the biblical proclamation of Christ from the standpoint of Asian humanity.

One of the ways they do this by is by addressing Asian issues – theological, social, economic, political, religious – with the message of the love of God in Christ. Issues of human suffering, poverty, exploitation, political dictatorship, injustice, greed, idolatry, etc are some that both Koyama and Song have dealt with. It is the challenges of non-Christians against Christian Christological claims that lead Song to espouse the Christological principle of the unity of God’s act and being in the love of Christ. The issues of war, misery and meaningless human destruction prompt Koyama to a criticism of idolatry and greed with particular reference to Japan.

Another way is the use of indigenous Asian words such as tsurasa, yarusesana, varuna, thun-ai to express the love of God in Christ to Asians in a meaningful way. Concepts and ideas drawn from the Buddhist vocabulary (e.g. greed (tanha), suffering (dukkha), self-denial (annatta), etc.) are used quite frequently by both Koyama and Song to illuminate
Christian beliefs about God, humanity and the world.

A common characteristic of the style of Koyama and Song is the use of symbols and imagery. Koyama for example insists that theology must be derived from the country and from the raw situations in which it is to be expounded. He thus takes his illustrations from the most down to earth, everyday objects and experiences. In a land of waterbuffalos, cock-fighting, pepper, spices, Buddhist monks, obviously it would be much easier for Asians to understand God’s love when expressed in those local images and symbols than it would when expressed otherwise. In Song, the use of symbols and images is in line with his idea of theology as the 'imaging' of God. In stories, poem, parables, folktales, he finds God’s love being imaged in the human loves and pains described.

The use of the imagination or intuition is a feature of Koyama and Song’s style and method. In a review of TUN, A. J. van der Bent suggests one sees here a "new and imaginative" treatment of scripture, Oriental wisdom and ecumenical theology.14 This particular way of viewing reality is very much a part of the Asian spirituality itself. Rooted in the mysticism of the East, imagination and intuition is part of the way Asian people perceive the world. Similarly Koyama and Song’s common emphasis on Asian experience which we have spoken about has its roots in the primacy of experience over

theoretical knowledge which characterises the spirituality of Asia.\textsuperscript{15}

C. Main Conclusions:

1. Gospel and Culture.

The primary concern of indigenous theology is with the expression of the Gospel in relation to a given culture.\textsuperscript{16} Within the context of modern mission, the need for an indigenous theology arises from the realization by both missionaries and 'indigenous church' members that the Gospel is not a western cultural possession. That is to say, the Gospel is not culture and culture is not the Gospel. However, while no culture can identify itself with the Gospel without falling into syncretism, cultural imperialism and even idolatry, it is also realized that the cultural dimension of the Gospel has to be taken seriously if real communication is to take place. The western garb in which the Gospel has

\textsuperscript{15} According to Amaladoss, a characteristic of Indian Spirituality is the importance given to experience over theoretical knowledge. He writes, "the wisdom which India's sages were after was not mere philosophical knowledge but an experiential consciousness - a knowledge experienced and lived. It did not matter so much to them how one thought; but it was all-important what one experienced. ... Doctrine is secondary." M. A. Amaladoss, "Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality," Religion and Society, Vol. XVI, no. 2 (June 1969), p. 13.

\textsuperscript{16} The understanding of culture presupposed here is a wholistic concept encompassing everything that has to do with human existence. It includes past, present and future dimensions of human life.
come to non-western lands has to be replaced with Japanese kimonos, Indian saris, Maori piupius and Samoan lavalavas.

Culture plays a decisive role in the construction of meaning and human understanding. How people perceive and receive the Gospel is largely determined by their cultural context. Therefore the Gospel needs to be culturally presented. For it to be meaningfully conveyed and received, it must be communicated in forms and modes with which people are familiar. Only in so doing can the Gospel become rooted in the cultural soil, enabling an eventual inner transformation in the life of the people. This transformation is manifested in the life of society.

2. Indigenous Theology:

Fundamentally, indigenous theology is a methodological approach to the task of reflecting upon and expressing the faith centred on the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ. Indigenous theology is a legitimate Christian activity which seeks to make the biblical faith intelligible and relevant to the experience of people in a particular culture. It does this by drawing on all the cultural resources available in the belief that by means of these resources, a more adequate expression of the love of God in Christ than at present obtaining is achieved. It does this also by raising questions and addressing historic issues of vital concern to the indigenous people.
Of crucial importance for the purpose of indigenous theology is the language by which it seeks to express the content of the Christian faith. Such a language has to be one with which people are familiar. Language here is not meant to be taken simply in terms of linguistic structure, but rather in terms of what Song calls the "grammar, syntax and semantics" of a culture. It refers to the whole communication network which creates the systems of meaning within a culture. It encompasses culturally founded conceptual categories of thought and meaning. It includes all literary forms and modes of communication that are appropriate and meaningful in a given cultural setting: symbols, images, signs, metaphors, parables, poetry, etc. Language also incorporates all those realities and experiences pertaining to the sitz im leben of a particular people.

Indigenous theology is therefore particularized theology. It is theology which is oriented to a specific cultural context. It arises from within the particularity of people's historical experience of the Christian faith and seeks to speak back to that particular experience. This does not mean that indigenous theology is unconcerned with the universal dimension of the faith. Rather by centering its activity within the orbit of a particular cultural framework, it adds new light and illuminates the meaning of the one universal faith. Through the insights derived from its particularized activity, it makes an important contribution to the universal understanding of the faith and the enrichment of the Church.
An indigenous theology remains in constant and mutual interaction with the wider community of faith.

Indigenous theology, as an approach to the common task of witnessing to the love of God in Christ, is validated by the incarnation of God in history. While there are risks involved in the effort to indigenize expressions of God’s love, these risks should not deter Christians from attempting to make that love a living reality giving meaning, hope and life to people in different cultural situations.

Indigenous theology is not concerned with a concept of God, rather it deals with the love of God in action and how this may be made manifest in culture. This is an insight gained from Song and Koyama.

3. Koyama and Song – Indigenous Theology?

The question of whether Koyama’s and Song’s theological efforts can be seen as attempts to engage in indigenous theology is decided on the basis of our research findings as summed up in the previous sections. In the light of our examination of the concept of indigenous theology, it can be seen that both Koyama and Song’s theologies display precisely those concerns, attributes and features which are characteristic of indigenous theology. One can therefore conclude that they are in fact attempting a form of indigenous theology.

As we have seen, the fundamental concern underlying Koyama’s theological re-rooting programme and Song’s
theological transposition is with an understanding of the faith that takes into serious consideration the realities of the Asian experience and the questions that arise from it. What is the meaning of the love of God in Christ in the context of Asian histories, cultures, religions, and suffering? Both are feeling after a way of being Christian that accepts that task.

In their attempts to give expression to the love of God in Christ, both Koyama and Song seek to do this by fixing their theological reflection particularly on those issues of critical concern to Asians. In the language they employ to express the love of God acting in the histories of Asia, Koyama and Song try to utilize appropriate categories of thought and meaning which Asian people themselves are familiar with and can understand. Their usage of imageries and Asian symbols is consistent with this effort.

They try to proclaim the gospel of Christ not in abstract ideas, but in the simplest language possible using theological raw materials that are familiar to hearers or 'objects that are immediately tangible.' The bias against the abstract and systematization is not only an attempt to move away from the western mode of theologizing but also something that is quite consistent with the more imaginative and perceptual way of seeing things which is characteristic of the Asian orientation.

In chapters 10 and 15, the theological attempts of Koyama and Song were considered respectively in the light of the criteria for an indigenous theology. In this consideration,
it was found that both Koyama and Song's theologies met all the criteria proposed. Here then is another reason for supporting this conclusion.
Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association, which are stipulated in the Constitution, and freedom of exchanging revolutionary experience, which is not stipulated in the Constitution, have all been truly practised in the great revolution and granted with the support by the Party Central Committee headed by Chairman Mao. This is something which the Chinese people had not possessed for several thousand years. It is something so active and lively. It is one extraordinary achievement of the revolution.

But this Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has not accomplished the tasks of a great proletarian cultural revolution, because it has not enabled the people to hold firmly in their hands the weapon of extensive people's democracy. How should the rights of revolutionary supervision of the masses over the leadership at various levels in the party and the state be stipulated? And how should it be explicitly stipulated that when certain cadres... have lost the trust of the broad masses of people, the people "can dismiss them at any time?"

Are the people's democratic rights not written in our Constitution and Party Constitution and Central Committee documents? Yes, they have been written down. Not only that, but there also are the stipulations of "protecting the people's democracy," "not allowing malicious attack and revenge," and "forbidding extracting a confession by torture and interrogation." But these protections have been, in fact, always unavailable, while, on the contrary, fascist autocracy has been "allowed" to be practised.

(These are only parts of the document. Quoted by Song in TCG, pp. 225-6).
APPENDIX II.

"Theological Declaration of Korean Christians, 1973."

The experience of the South Korean Christians in their struggle for freedom and democracy is in Song's view, a strong witness to God's politics of resurrection at work in Asia. Under President Park's "institutionalization of authority" in the early seventies, Korean Christians absorbed much suffering and heartache. Yet in spite of all the atrocities of Park's dictatorship, the power of the resurrection hope comes to concrete expression in their determination to stand on the side of justice and freedom. In the midst of intimidation, imprisonment, torture, coercion and death, they found the courage to bring an indictment against the Park regime. In the "Theological Declaration of Korean Christians, 1973," it is declared that,

The present dictatorship in Korea is destroying rule by law and persuasion; it now rules by force and threat alone. Community is being turned into jungle. ...

The regime in Korea is destroying freedom of conscience and freedom of religious belief. There is freedom neither of expression nor of silence. There is interference by the regime in Christian churches' worship, prayer, gatherings, content of sermons, and teaching of the Bible. ...

The dictatorship in Korea is using systematic deception, manipulation and indoctrination to control the people. The mass media has been turned into the regime's propaganda machine to tell the people half-truths and outright lies and to control and manipulate information to deceive people. ...
The dictatorship in Korea uses sinister and inhuman and at the same time ruthlessly efficient means to destroy political opponents, intellectual critics and innocent people. The use of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) for this purpose is somewhat similar to the evil ways of the Nazi Gestapo or the KGB of the Stahlin era. People are physically and mentally tortured, intimidated and threatened and sometimes even disappear completely. Such treatments are indeed diabolical acts against humanity." (Quoted in TET, p. 181).

Song asserts that here in the action of the Korean Church is a forceful expression of the resurrection hope even amidst the pain and agony of the cross. By challenging those in power to humanize and democratize their political machinery and make it capable of serving the needs of the people, Christians are demonstrating a deep commitment to the resurrection faith; a commitment embodying an openness to the future and a vision of renewed life through the power of the risen Christ.
APPENDIX III.

The Folktale: 'The Tears Of Lady Meng.'

This happened in the reign of the wicked, unjust Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang-ti. He was afraid at this time that the Huns would break into the country from the north and not leave him any peace. In order to keep them in check, he decided to build a wall along the whole northern frontier of China. But no sooner was one piece built than another fell down, and the wall made no progress.

Then a wise man said to him: "A wall like this, which is over ten thousand miles long, can be built only if you immure a human being in every mile of the wall. Each mile will then have its guardian." It was easy for the Emperor to follow this advice, for he regarded his subjects as so much grass and weeds, and the whole land began to tremble under this threat.

Plans were then made for human sacrifice in great numbers. At the last minute "an ingenious scholar" suggested to the Emperor that it would be sufficient to sacrifice a man called Wan "since Wan means ten thousand." Soldiers were dispatched at once to seize Wan who was sitting with his bride at the wedding feast. He was carried off by the heartless soldiers, leaving Lady Meng, his bride, in tears. Eventually, heedless of the fatigues of the journey, she travelled over mountains and through rivers to find the bones of her husband.

When she saw the stupendous wall she did not know how to find the bones. There was nothing to be done, and she sat down and wept. Her weeping so affected the wall that it collapsed and laid bare her husband's bones.

When the Emperor heard of Meng Chiang and how she was seeking her husband, he wanted to see her himself. When she was brought before him, her unearthly beauty so struck him that he decided to make her Empress. She knew she could not avoid her fate, and therefore she agreed on three conditions. First, a festival lasting forty-nine days should be held in honour of her husband; second, the Emperor, with all his official, should be present at the burial; and third, he should build a terrace forty-nine feet high on the bank of the river, where she wanted to make a sacrifice to her husband.

... Ch'in Shih Huang-ti granted all her requests at once.

When everything was ready she climbed on to the terrace and began to curse the Emperor in a loud voice for all his cruelty and wickedness. Although this made the Emperor very angry, he held his peace. But when she jumped from the terrace into the river, he flew into a rage and ordered his soldiers to cut up her body into little pieces and grind her bones to powder. When they did this, the little pieces changed into little silver fish, in which the soul of faithful Meng Chiang lives forever.

(See TOLM, pp. 1-23).
ASIAN SPIRITUALITY: A REQUISITE FOR AN ASIAN THEOLOGY.

A point of crucial importance in Song's theological scheme is the role or place of what he calls 'Asian spirituality.' Song regards this as a necessary component or a prerequisite for an Asian theology. He asserts that it is precisely this spirituality which theology must seek to serve by making explicit the creative and redemptive meaning of all human historical and cultural experiences. It is from within the spirituality of the Asian people that the Christian gospel which seeks to lead people to the God of love manifested in Jesus Christ must find its echoes and responses.

Song believes that every individual or community has to respond to the Gospel from within the context of their own peculiar existence. Inevitably, this would mean that any response to the love of God in Christ cannot be unaffected by the spirituality which characterizes that particular historical context. At this point, some crucial questions need to be asked: How does Song understand the word spirituality? What does he mean by the phrase "Asian spirituality?" Given his definition of what spirituality is, what makes it distinctively Asian? What constitutes that which is properly referred to as Asia?
A. What is Spirituality?

Generally speaking, spirituality according to Song is a human characteristic or mood born out of the incessant pursuit of the human spirit for its ultimate source of power. Spirituality is expressed through the creative efforts of the human spirit. It materializes itself in what human beings are able to do, build, or create. The pyramids of ancient Egypt, the great wall of China, the Parthenon of Athena and the scientific and technological achievements of the modern age bring to concrete expression the dynamism of the human spirit. In these, Song asserts, we are confronted with the efforts of the human spirit to overcome the limitations of space and time.

The implication in this assertion seems obvious. Characteristic of the human spirit is its creativity and need for freedom from containment; freedom to extent itself to the highest level of being, or, the freedom to reach its final destiny, namely, eternal Being. Thus, almost all the physical and material achievements of human beings in all ages are, Song goes on to say, "manifestations of humanity's particular access to the source of power of being."¹ In historical and cultural monuments, we cannot but realize that human beings are immortal in the sense that their spirit goes on to live from one generation to another, from the past to the future.

Religion provides the most comprehensive expression of human spirituality. In religions, says Song, we see the

¹ TET, p. 1.
summation of this indomitable human spirit. This is so because religion, however we define it is "a synthetic effort of the human spirit to penetrate the mystery of the world beyond this world." This is true of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, to mention just the so-called great world religions. A temple or church for example, combines in itself the spiritual aspirations of human beings with their aesthetic consciousness and architectonic ingenuity. In religion, the diverse and rich endowments of the human spirit are concentrated in one predominant theme, namely, "human beings' search for the fulfilment of their spiritual aspirations in an eternal dimension."

In the light of what has been said, it seems clear that essentially, spirituality in Song's understanding has to do basically with the process of the search of human beings for that which is regarded by them as the ultimate source of their life and existence. In this sense, spirituality, can be understood to be derived from a religious faith or belief. However, it is not merely just that. Spirituality for Song has a much broader meaning. It is, he writes,

the totality of being that expresses itself in ways of life, modes of thinking, patterns of behaviour and conduct, and attitudes toward the mystery that surrounds our immediate world and that beckons us on to the height beyond heights, to the depth below depths and the light beyond lights."

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2 ibid., p. 2.
3 ibid.,
4 ibid., p. 10.
Obviously, spirituality involves a way of understanding the reality of being human in all its diverse aspects and dimensions. It incorporates all dimensions involved in the business of being human.

For Song, spirituality is not to be understood in terms of the traditional dualism between spirit and matter; between the spiritual and the material. Neither should it be viewed as something to be confined to the possession of the Christian Church or of any one religion. Rather spirituality is something that involves one's whole life and total existence and how one lives and understands that existence in relation to what one considers to be the Ultimate Reality. From a Christian perspective, spirituality encompasses the whole business of living and becoming a responsible human being. It includes one's commitments, loyalties, beliefs, discipline and living as a person in relation to God and to other persons.

Comparably, Song's view of spirituality is not very different from those held by contemporary Western theologians. Gordon Wakefield, for example, points out that spirituality is a word which has come much into vogue to describe "those attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people's lives

5 'Ultimate Reality,' is understood by Song in spiritual terms. It is that reality which relates to the spiritual longing of the human heart. Ultimate Reality stands for what human beings understand to be the ultimate force underlying all human life. It is the power of being. It therefore constitutes the beginning and goal of the spiritual life. It is the source of and destiny of one's being; the "source of life, hope and light." C. S. Song, "Love of God-and-man in Action" in Doing Theology Today, ed., C. S. Song (Madras: CLS, 1976), pp. 42ff.
and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities." Following Urs von Balthasar, R. Cant defines spirituality as "the way a man understands his own ethically and religiously committed existence, and the way he acts and reacts habitually to this understanding." John Macquarrie has in fact summed up Song's understanding when he states that "fundamentally spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense ..."

The similarity between Song and these Western theologians with regard to understandings of spirituality is quite apparent. And from this, it can be concluded that spirituality is a neutral concept. That is to say, since it has to do basically with the reality of being 'human,' the meaning of spirituality is more or less the same for Asians as it is for Western theologians. Song himself does admit this to be so; that "such spirituality is present both in the East and West." If this is the case, then what is an Asian spirituality? What makes spirituality distinctively Asian?

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B. 'Asian' Spirituality.

An understanding of Song's theological methodology may enable us to answer these questions. Song uses a "contextual model" for doing theology; a model which takes seriously the historical and cultural context in which one lives and works. Theological reflection thus begins with a serious consideration of a particular culture (in this case, Asian) as the matrix of theology and what this means for one's total world view and way of thinking.

According to Song, every person is indebted to his/her own culture; is shaped and conditioned by it. We are all under the power of the culture into which we are born. Our cultural heritage makes us what we are. Our views of life and the world are formed under the direct and indirect influence of our cultural traditions - historical, religious, social, philosophical and so on. It follows therefore that one's spirituality is intricately bound up with one's culture.

In an article entitled "Asian Spirituality", Koyama makes the same point asserting that no spirituality can be thought of separately from its cultural background. Spirituality and culture are inseparable entities. The two go together since "spirituality is spirit in communion and in mutuality with culture." 11


To illustrate what is meant by an Asian spirituality, Song draws examples from Asian cultures, especially those of Japan and China. In the case of the former, Song refers to the essence of Japanese spirituality as being "visibly and distinctly Buddhist and Confucianist." In other words, Japanese spirituality has its roots in the religions of Buddha and Confucius. And to show how this spirituality is expressed, he points to a number of things among which modern architecture with its taste, contour, colour, and composition of ideas is one.

In sum, the spirituality of the Japanese people can really be put down to one word, namely, "sibui". This is a distinctively Japanese national characteristic that has no exact equivalent in English. 'Sibui,' Song describes, is a kind of quality that conveys a controlled reserve toward life and the world. It is a quality that comes from contemplating our own destiny with Stoic composure. ... Sibui is eloquent in silence, aggressive in resignation, forceful in reserve. It emanates a kind of spiritual power that enables us to cross the boundary of life and death without fear.12

In the light of this description one could, incidentally, begin to understand the unique action of the Japanese 'kamikase' squadron (suicide pilots) during World War II, as well as the practice of the ancient Japanese samurai (and later military officials) to take their own lives willingly and without reserve in order to preserve personal, family, clan and national honour.

12 C. S. Song, op. cit., p. 9.
The formation of 'sibui' is the result of long years of assimilation into the fabric of Japanese society of the spirit of Chinese Confucianism and Buddhism. In Zen Buddhism – which is more a way of moral and physical discipline than a system of metaphysics, and which permeates Japanese society – this sibui quality is most evident. Zen Buddhism sums up the spirituality known as 'sibui' spirituality.

For the Chinese, the influences of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism did not result in the same sibui quality as was the result in Japan. Chinese spirituality is rather characterized by the term "han-hsu." This word describes the general characteristics of those brought up in the Chinese cultural tradition. Han-hsu is not exactly reserve, nor is it shyness. Whilst it resembles sibui in certain aspects, it is not so rugged as sibui. It is the ability to contain in ourselves our will and passion and not to give them free reign. It is a quality of a person of wisdom and experience who knows how to stop at the right moment and at the right point. Persons of han-hsu do not impose themselves on others. They treat others with sincerity and do not step over the boundaries of human decency and understanding. A person of han-hsu is a person of moral discipline, that is, propriety and sincerity of heart. Chinese spirituality is thus han-hsu spirituality.

It must be noted that the description of han-hsu given thus far does not, to any great extent, show it to be anything peculiar to the Chinese. Such quality is also found among other peoples in varying degrees. However, the peculiarity of

[13 ibid., p. 9.]
han-hsu would perhaps be differentiated and realized if we look at the analogy Song uses to clarify it. Han-hsu spirituality is compared to a tulip that has reached a certain stage. A stage where its beauty is not derived from unreserved openness but from restrained self-assurance. In such a tulip, what one sees "is not laughter but a smile, not coquettishness but gracious seduction, not open challenge but implied strength." ¹⁴ What is implied in this is a kind of spirituality which has at its centre the distinguished characteristics of serenity, detachment, indifference, and confidence in oneself.

Whilst these descriptions of Japanese and Chinese spiritualities are both interesting and enlightening, they still do not give an adequate explanation of what is distinctively "Asian" about spirituality. For one thing, Japan and China alone do not in any way constitute the boundaries of properly so-called Asia. For another, the spiritualities of Japan and China cannot suffice to represent the wealth of religions and the diversity of cultural traditions found in Asia. As Koyama has pointed out,

ASIA, the vast geographical territory properly known by that name and which excludes the Middle East, the Pacific and Australasia is a region of many cultures, and the rich cultural diversity in languages, customs, ethnic groupings, religious traditions and diverse economic levels has produced a variety of spiritual orientations. ¹⁵

For this reason, one can only think of Asian spirituality as a plural reality; that is, "there are Asian Buddhist

¹⁴ ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵ Kosuke Koyama, loc. cit.,
spirituality, Asian Islamic spirituality and Asian Christian spirituality." 16 Now if this is so, how can it be possible to speak of a common spirituality for this vast Asian region?

Granted that spirituality is bound up with religio-cultural beliefs and being human in relation to the source of being; granted also that Asia consists of numerous religions and cultures, it would certainly seem impossible to speak of an Asian spirituality. However, Koyama claims that in spite of all the cultural and religious diversities found in Asia, it is possible to think of a common base of Asian spirituality. Viewed against Western spirituality, it would be possible to highlight the distinctive features of an Asian spirituality. Koyama sees the fundamental contrast between the two as this: Asian spirituality is cosmological (i.e. concerned with undifferentiated totality before creation) while Western spirituality is eschatological (i.e. interested in differentiated totality after creation.) 17

It is precisely this same kind of reasoning that lies behind Song’s view of an Asian spirituality. Indeed, Song is not unaware of the questions that are likely to arise out of his speaking of Asian spirituality in the singular. But the point he tries to make is that, in comparison to Western spirituality which is unequivocally Christian in its formation and rational in outlook, there is an Asian spirituality which is distinctively different, by virtue of the fact that it is, on the whole, not Christian but Confucianist and Buddhist in

16 ibid., pp. 29-30.

17 ibid.,
origin. And this Asian spirituality ought to be given serious consideration in the task of theology in Asia.


It is worth noting at this point that one of the basic assumptions in Song’s theological writing is that the methodological approach of the Western Church to questions of faith and the ways of God with human beings need not be regarded as the only valid way. Asian ways are just as valid. Song observes that traditional Western theology has stressed the importance of reason in gaining access to what is beyond ourselves, that is, access to knowledge of God. The approach to faith is, by and large, conceptual and rational. Whilst he does not dismiss the importance of reason in theological reflection, Song believes that the conceptual and rational frameworks employed by Western Christians are poorly equipped to enable Asians to get to the heart of the God.

Not only that, rational theology does not, in fact, really conform to the ways in which God relates Godself to the world. The relationship between God and humanity is more a matter of the heart than of the rational faculty. It is in the human heart that the primary perception of the heart of God takes place. Thus communication between the Spirit of God and the human spirit is a communication of hearts. It is a

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"conversation between the Deep and the deep."

The language of this communication is the "language of the heart."

Reason only takes second place. Its function is to analyze, systematize and interpret what the heart perceives, experiences and intuits.

Thus, the characteristic way in which the Asian mind works with regard to matters of faith seems more appropriate for interpreting the truth of the Christian faith. Here, Song is referring to the Asian theological framework that is by and large based on perception and intuition. He writes,

In comparison with a conceptual, rational approach to faith in some major Western theological traditions and schools, the Asian ways of viewing the ultimate reality are rather perceptual and intuitive.

As I see it, it is this basic approach of the Asian mind toward reality which lies behind Song’s understanding of an Asian spirituality.

For Song, Asian spirituality is basically a view of life. It is specifically the "Asian" worldview based on traditional and cultural spiritual values regarded to be determinative of the meaning of human existence. It refers to the ethos of Asian cultures that is largely informed by Buddhist, Confucianist, Taoist, Hindu values and beliefs and comes to

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21 ibid., p. 55.

22 ibid., pp. 50-51.
expression in the perceptual and intuitive ways by which Asians characteristically tend to interpret reality.

How Asian persons view the world and understand life in all its complexities, whether through Buddhist or Confucianist, or Taoist or Hindu eyes; how they express this understanding of the world in ways of life, modes of thought, patterns of behaviour and conduct, and attitudes toward that which is the object of their ultimate concerns - all these together constitute a spirituality that warrants the label "Asian".

It is this spirituality which ought to be given serious consideration by Asian theologians. Song suggests that this Asian spirituality must form the scope of Christian theology and which theology must seek to serve in Asia. By doing this, a real conversion in Christians as well as people of other faiths may be brought about. Not only that, but this should also prove to be an enrichment to the churches within the western cultural tradition.
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